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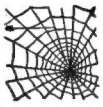

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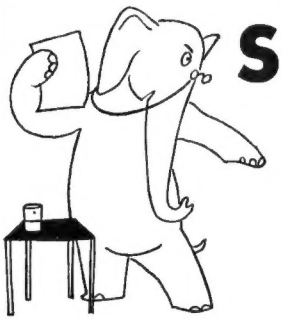

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By
THOMSON
BURTIS

Author of "Handicaps"

DUKE DALY
Looks at Crime

EVER since the far from salubrious soirée which I am about to get off my chest, I have been devoting a considerable proportion of my allowance of thinking time to reflections on the fine art of murder and the ingredients of a perfect crime. The Border Patrol, which the Army Air Service runs along the Rio Grande, has duties which are calculated to turn an elderly member of it, like myself, into somewhat of a connoisseur of criminality in its broader aspects; and First Lieutenant Slim Evans, which is the name I go by when I'm not in trouble, has always considered himself somewhat privy to the nuances of nefariousness. That is, I did until I saw with my own eyes what was pulled on Duke Daly in Burley.

I have furthermore reached the decision that not only is there plenty of framing done which doesn't concern pictures, but that many of the frames to which I refer, when constructed by a skilful mechanic of the art, can hold you so helpless that you might as well be a painting for all the help you can be to yourself.

The joke of the matter is that when the shindig started I considered myself lucky.

It was a steaming hot afternoon, and Texas was just a big flapjack in the process of being fried, as I landed my D.H. from patrol to receive the news. As I unwound, unfolded and disjointed my six feet six of scrawny carcass from the cockpit, I beheld Lieutenant Texas Q. McDowell standing on the steps of headquarters gesturing at me in a semaphoric manner. As I abstracted myself from the ship, I came to the conclusion

that Tex wanted me over at headquarters immediately, so I ambled languidly in that direction.

You might as well give a casual cast of your astral eye in my direction now, and get acquainted.

As I walked across the shimmering little airdrome, I was arrayed in oil-stained khaki breeches and an undershirt that had seen better days. Two years before it had been a veritable jewel of a shirt; but the laundries had had their way with it—and my ship pumped plenty of oil, which accounted for its dapple-gray color. My helmet removed, there was nothing to hide stringy hair of a neutral, mouse-like color, part of which hung down over a countenance which is a curious phenomenon among faces. Its principal claim to fame is my nose.

They say that in ancient days when men were bold and didn't have to paint hair on their chests, there was a bird named Cyrano de Bergerac who was reputed to have quite a proboscis for his time. Don't let those stories fool you. I keep a picture of him on my wall just to snort at when snorting material runs low. He might have been famous in his old home town, but it would have been just another nose around Texas. When you remember that I am six feet six tall and thinner than Army soup, you may be able to visualize the human flagpole with a nose stuck in front of it who was flapping his way toward headquarters.

"What, ho, Texas, what ho!" I greeted McDowell.

"Good cheer, Slimuel, good cheer!" Tex grinned, waving a paper importantly. "Duke Daly's practically here already."

I folded up on the steps.

"Work or pleasure?" I inquired, as a fairly pleasant premonition started premoniting within me.

"Both," drawled the wide-shouldered Texan with great unction.

He could smell excitement farther than a foxhound can a fox, and will willingly travel any distance on his hands and knees to sample it.

"Cast an eye over this, then start tracking down your toothbrush," Tex told me as he stuck a radiogram under my nose.

It read as follows:

COMMANDING OFFICER
MCMULLEN FLIGHT
A S BORDER PATROL
MCMULLEN TEXAS
DALY ON WAY THERE BY AIR STOP HAVE LIEUTENANTS EVANS AND MCDOWELL READY TO LEAVE IMMEDIATELY ON DALY'S ARRIVAL STOP CARRY FOUR HUNDRED POUND BOMBS IN ADDITION TO AMPLE SUPPLY OF AMMUNITION STOP DALY HAS FULL INSTRUCTIONS STOP OFFICERS MENTIONED SHOULD BE PREPARED TO STAY AWAY FROM POST FOR SEVERAL DAYS IF NECESSARY

It was signed by two names. One was the Commanding Officer of the Eighth Corps area, but it was the other name that leaped up at me like a cuss-word from a Sunday School book. The name was Graves. And Mr. Graves's position was one of high altitude in the Federal Secret Service.

I stared at the thing stupidly for a minute.

"If Daly's on it, it's big," I said finally, "and if Graves is as near as San Antone—"

"It's monumental." Tex grinned expansively. "Come on, you human skyscraper—shake a leg and pack a bag."

This we proceeded to do with a great gusto, yodeling exultant roundelays under the showers while we did a lot of wondering.

I WAS no sooner dressed and packed than the noise of a Liberty motor apprised me of the fact that former Lieutenant Duke Daly was in our midst. Such members of the gang as were not on patrol or pounding their ear were on

the line to greet him, Tex and I in the lead. He was alone in the D.H, dressed in cover-alls, and as he hopped out he threw Tex and me one of his rare warm smiles. It came and went like a bolt of lightning. The next instant his face was stern as he asked crisply—

"Your ship ready?"

Tex nodded as we shook hands.

"Haven't you even time to have a drink?" he drawled.

Daly shook his head.

"We're off as quick as my ship is gassed," he said, in the precise phraseology which was one of his characteristics. "Come over here and I'll tell you about it."

Right there you get a little slant at Duke Daly in one of his many moods. He didn't stop for greetings, salutations or introductions to the other flyers. Nor, except for that one quick smile, would you have suspected that he and Tex McDowell were bosom friends who hadn't seen each other for nearly a year. Without a word he led us over into the shade of a corrugated iron hangar which the sun had turned into a huge oven.

As he turned to face us I had a feeling that, extraordinary as Duke Daly's reactions, appearance and emotions ordinarily were, he was now in a very unusual state of mind even for him. His remarkable gray eyes seemed to be gazing through and beyond us.

His unlined face, with its almost too regular features, was a handsome mask, as always. In its way, that pan of his was as remarkable as my own. A bad wreck during his Air Service days had practically wiped it out. Consequently, the doctors hammered and sawed and chiseled and grafted until they had constructed a new one. As a result of his lurid career before entering the Air Service and the ability of the Army face carpenters, Daly had the eyes of a fifty-year-old man, and the face of a twenty-two-year old boy; he had attained the actual age of thirty-two.

"There's no use going into detail," he said levelly, "because I can tell you a lot more after we get there. We're going to Burley."

When Duke Daly showed as much excitement as I felt burning through that shell of his it was time for Lieutenant Slimuel X. Evans to roll up his sleeves, spit on his hands and prepare for action.

"Burley!" breathed Tex, and I echoed a hardy amen to the mingled surprise and delight in his voice.

For Burley was more than just another booming oil town. They've had many villages around the mid-Continent fields where they brought in the Rangers or the Militia to calm the boys' high spirits; but Burley had such a bad reputation that the sentiment of the State was to keep hands off as long as it didn't bother outsiders. The law hoped devoutly that it would bite itself often enough to give itself hydrophobia and pass on into peace.

Daly threw back the collar of his cover-alls and revealed the insignia of a lieutenant of Air Service on his shirt collar. The hint of a smile widened his tight-lipped mouth.

"For our purposes," he said, "I shall be Lieutenant Crane in charge of this special detail. The purpose of the detail is to give Burley a look-over and make a casual survey of conditions—to hear us tell it."

That intangible something which showed that Daly was laboring under a strain made me, and apparently Tex also, forget the fact that he hadn't given a sign of pleasure in seeing us again. There was nothing but gathering excitement in me—and I'll swear I don't know exactly why.

"I presume," drawled Tex, waving spaciously at the ships, "that we're going to bomb it in various places just to get a look at the humus."

Daly didn't crack a smile.

"I don't mean to be mysterious," he said without emotion, "but until we get there even I don't know more than half of what it's all about. Furthermore, the difference between success and failure

may be a matter of minutes."

"For a man that doesn't want to be mysterious," I informed him, "you're doing a pretty good low and lofty job of inflating my curiosity. I'm likely to explode with a loud report any time."

Tex had been studying the blond ex-flyer unobtrusively. There had always been a bond between them which was one of those things that passeth understanding. I guess that was responsible for Tex's taking a step forward and saying very deliberately—

"You're not looking forward to this much, are you, Duke?"

For a second it seemed that the curtains which had been drawn over Daly's eyes were raised, and I had a quick peep into the inner turmoil that his outward shell protected. His haunted eyes gave me the creeps. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"You're right," he said evenly. "Just my own foolishness, of course. It's got to be done. Come on; let's go!"

And go we did, our three planes flying a loose V-formation down the Rio Grande. We were easing through the ether at nearly a hundred and twenty miles an hour, too, and my throttle was all the way forward to keep pace with the Duke. If anything more had been needed to prove to me that Mr. Daly wasn't fooling, it was that little matter of flying our Liberties wide open across the limitless sea of mesquite that stretched away to the skyline.

AS WE sped through the atmosphere an occasional sidelong look at Tex showed me that the slow-spoken Southerner was doing a little bit of worrying about Duke. I didn't do any worrying, but I did do a little wondering between pleasant thoughts of a night in Burley. I always enjoy the prospect of unusual happenings—although my trying to handle a troublesome situation by myself reminds me of a beetle trying to beat a bass-drum. The best you can say for me is that I try.

However, as I said, I did devote some cogitation to the Duke. One had to know him well to realize that when his poise was shaken even slightly he was in a bad way. I would have thought that maybe his past was catching up with him except that this was certainly an official expedition.

I was one of the few people who were in on that past. Reading from left to right, he had run away from home when just a kid. Along with comparatively harmless things like hoboing, he had been a professional gambler and had killed a couple of men under more or less excusable, but nevertheless embarrassing, circumstances. A peculiar duck—those years on his own, doing things he had not been bred to do, had built up an almost impenetrable shell around what Tex estimated to be an ultra-sensitive nature. He had taught himself to be self-sufficient. Except for his friendship for Graves and McDowell, he seemed to live his real life absolutely alone. He had read more than anybody I'd ever known; and, so far as I was concerned, what he thought or felt about anything was a closed book.

An hour after we had started I was compelled to lift my nose from the shelter of the windshield as the far-famed town of Burley came into view. It was twenty miles north of the Border and off our regular patrol, so I looked with considerable interest at the mushroom town which had grown in less than four months.

Daly was already diving with his motor only slightly throttled. I had to hold my goggles straight and protect my nostrils from the airstream as I took a look.

The quick Texas twilight was about to settle down over the scene. A few lights were already on down below, which made that city of tents and shacks and rawboned buildings seem a little bit less of a curiosity. The core of the town, which had grown from a village of four hundred to a city of thirty thousand, was a big open square.

On its four sides there were continuous lines of unpainted frame buildings from two to four stories high. And, gentlemen, in that square there were at least five thousand people, clogging the sidewalks and what had once been a tiny park. It looked like a movie mob scene, but I knew it was just an ordinary afternoon in Burley.

Rising from the center of the square were four oil-blackened derricks. Here and there, emerging from the acres of squat temporary structures that made up the town, were other derricks. Surrounding the heart of this noted municipality was a circle of derricks—a circle perhaps a mile in circumference. In some spots they were packed so close together that a cross-eyed driller might easily find himself working on the wrong well. The land for a half mile on all sides of Burley was black with oil. Rutted trails which couldn't be called roads zigzagged in all directions; and vehicles of all descriptions were crawling over them like bugs. Drooping mesquite trees, smothered in oil, lent the last touch of ugliness to the primitive panorama.

Here and there were huge sumps—artificial lakes of oil for which there were not enough storage tanks. I had the feeling that these sumps had once been pretty lakes and that some influence had come along to turn the landscape into a black, greasy, gassy desert.

There's something about an oil town on the boom and hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil spouting up from the ground that gets a rise out of me. The town itself had a surge and a drive about it that I could feel even at two thousand feet. That might have been my imagination, but the smell of petroleum which assailed my nostrils was not.

I was following Daly without thinking. The dial was reading one hundred and fifty miles an hour. That meant we were diving with considerable celerity. Suddenly I realized that he was pointed toward a remarkable oasis in the picture of raw industry below.

Half a mile north of the center of the town a large house was set on top of a low, rolling hill. It was as white as the rest of the town was black, and the hillside which sloped away to the outskirts of the town, perhaps two hundred yards from the house, was as green as only honest grass could make it. It looked like an old Southern mansion, although very much out of place. About a hundred yards east of the house there was a derrick which had not yet been blackened with oil, evidently a new well going down.

"If that baby comes in the paint bills on that hut are going to be plenty!" I remarked to myself, and then proceeded to forget the matter as I devoted myself to my landing.

I could see that Daly was headed for a long narrow clearing which occupied the slope behind this white mansion on the northern side of the hill. As far as I could see it was the only spot within ten miles where a plane might land. Then I noticed something else. Up in one corner of it, partially shielded by a few mesquite trees, was a small airplane. It was painted khaki, and I had to look twice to make sure it was there.

Now that I knew where we were going to land, I took another squint at the town. The well known shades of night were being pulled down fast. There were many more lights turned on. All of the open doorways fronting the square were brightly illuminated. From a distance the place looked like Coney Island. And, believe me, we were prominent visitors. Our airplanes were attracting more attention than a circus parade. It seemed that every moving human in Burley, to say nothing of the roughnecks at work on derrick floors, became motionless.

"An airplane isn't such a startling sight as that!" I thought to myself. A few goose pimples broke out on me as I realized that it must be because our planes were Border Patrol ships—and landing.

Another thing I noticed as we swung our ships around North of the field for the landing was that not a living soul popped into sight from that big white house. I didn't think much of it at the time, however.

It was no trick to land—the field was at least three hundred yards long, and we came in uphill. A lone horseman about a hundred yards south of the civilian ship was a reception committee of one as our ships trundled to rest halfway up the field. Daly immediately swung his ship around and taxied toward this horseman. Tex and I followed. I had a hunch that the stranger wasn't on a tea-time canter for his health, and I was correct.

The nearest oil well was a couple of hundred yards away; the roughnecks were at work attaching another fourble to the drill stem. We wouldn't have visitors for a little while, at least.

NO SOONER was Daly out of his ship than he took off his cover-alls. The horseman rode up to him. I turned off the gas, snapped off the switches and dismounted from my trusty D.H. I'd put on a shirt in honor of the occasion; so had Tex. Far be it from us not to observe the social amenities laid down by Mr. Daly, so we took off our cover-alls and appeared as full-fledged Army officers in khaki shirts and breeches and field boots somewhat the worse for wear.

The stranger and Daly were talking a mile a minute as Tex and I walked toward them. He was a paunchy gent with gray hair, a fat face and a melancholy-looking gray mustache. The two ends of it drooped over his mouth like a couple of tusks. As we got close he removed his hat. His head was bald on top.

Daly turned toward us quickly after a glance at the house. That domicile was lived in if open windows and flapping curtains and a barking dog were any criteria.

"This is Mr. John Sanger, one of our best men," Daly said evenly. "He's been running a hot dog stand here for the last six weeks. Lieutenant McDowell, Lieutenant Evans, Mr. Sanger."

My mouth opened at the news that the moth-eaten gent before us was a noted Secret Service agent, but I got over it handsomely as I shook hands.

"From what I hear, this town is so tough that your hot dogs have rabies!" I said jocularly.

As Sanger was about to answer, Daly's even voice cut in.

"You'll have to pardon me, boys, if I do all the talking," he said, and his eyes had that same staring quality that I had noticed before. "The situation is as bad as I thought. The man who lives in that white house—his Burley name is Frank Cone—is likely to be here any minute. He's not only the king of the town but the principal man we're after."

He stopped for a minute as if collecting his thoughts. Tall, slim and straight, his aquiline face expressionless, he was gazing far into the distance.

Sanger, his battered soft hat now pulled low over his bushy gray eyebrows, seemed entirely without interest in the proceedings.

"The reason Mr. Sanger and other agents have been here," Daly went on finally, "is this: As a result of investigation of a perfect flood of dope which suddenly appeared in Chicago and Eastern cities, some of Graves's men discovered an oil tank car shipped from Burley containing narcotics. It was worth over a million dollars. Two things are certain: That wasn't the first or last shipment by tank car. Second, the men on this end are closely tied up with the most powerful underworld leaders in the East. In other words, it is a matter of national scope. Sanger tells me that this man Cone is certainly the big shot on this end."

Daly was talking with careful precision as if he didn't want to waste a word. I asked—

"That means there are a lot of city

gangsters along with the bad men of the wide open spaces around Burley, doesn't it?"

Daly nodded.

"I'm here because I knew Frank Cone well years ago. He knows plenty about me."

For a second Daly hesitated again, his eyes flickering from Sanger to me. Tex, his face tense and strained, stood like a statue as if he expected what was to come.

"For instance," Daly went on, "he knows that my father is a prominent judge in Louisville—and that I was a crooked gambler, which my folks do not know, among other things."

I drew in my breath as I commenced to see vaguely what Daly was driving at. There was something in his attitude and words that dared Sanger and me to think the worst of him. Not a sign of suffering showed in his face or eyes as he went on coldly:

"Sanger is certain that neither Cone nor his right hand man has any idea that I'm a Federal agent. I'm a crooked gambler who has wormed his way into the Army. I'm in charge of this flight. Burley in general, or Cone and his gang in particular, don't want any part of the law down here. Inasmuch as we've got in, representing the law whether they like it or not, what could be more pleasant than to have the commanding officer an ex-crook?"

He seemed to be deliberately torturing himself as he talked with that deadly precision which made him seem more like a machine than a man.

"Cone knew me well enough in the old days to know that I'd rather lose an arm than to have the folks know some things about me. Mr. Graves and I expect that Cone will figure that I can be easily bribed to protect them. They will figure that the threat of exposing my past and ruining my career will be an additional weapon which will force me to help them rather than hurt them. Besides that, there is nothing that Cone knows about me which wouldn't lead him to believe that I would be very glad to cooperate with him if there was money enough in it."

"Nuts!" snapped McDowell suddenly.

It seemed that the big Texan couldn't bear to have his friend talk that way about himself.

"Why the hell do you stand there and try to make yourself out a slimy crook?" McDowell went on slowly. "Suppose you did do a little gambling when you were a kid. There's no sense—"

"Kidding myself," Daly interjected with icy calm.

At that second those curtains over his eyes lifted again and for the second they revealed two pools of suffering. I suddenly realized that Duke Daly didn't have a chance, any way you looked at it. If he succeeded in getting the goods on Cone and his men, his past would be exposed by them, anyway, out of revenge . . .

"Cone even knows about a man I killed," Daly said quietly. "If I ever went to trial for it, it would mean plenty of hell for me. Taking it all in all, I don't think he'll have any worries about keeping me in line and through me seeing that the Border Patrol doesn't interfere in Burley."

"Here he comes now," Sanger said unemotionally. As one man we turned to watch a tall, lean figure in spotless riding clothes who was coming down the steps of the house.

"All right now. Get this," Daly said swiftly. "I don't think he'll openly recognize me. I'll take my cue from him. He'll try to make a deal with me of some kind before the day is over, while I pretend to follow in line with it and try to get the outfit dead to rights. The one most important thing to Cone, Sanger will tell you about if I don't have a chance to. If we can't work together for the rest of the day, your object is to size up the lay of the land with Sanger and lay plans to kidnap this other man and fly him out of here at the proper opportunity. Army offi-

cers or no Army officers, law or no law, nothing short of a regiment of Militia is going to be able to arrest this outfit and get them out of town in the ordinary way."

His words were uncolored by feeling, but as he talked I could sense the fire within him. As for me, I was more or less afire myself, though my savage enjoyment of the prospect was quieted by the price Daly was going to pay for either success or failure.

"Watch out, boys!" came Sanger's quiet warning. "Get ready to meet Frank Cone, a combination of city racketeer and Texas bad man who combines the most dangerous features of each!"

I TURNED to feast my eyes on the tall man who was approaching us with long, unhurried strides. His lengthy legs, immaculately attired in spotless whipcord breeches and highly polished cordovan boots, were designed for the purpose of covering ground fast.

Cone, except for a quick look at Tex and myself, kept his attention focused exclusively on the Duke. So far as he was concerned, Tex, Sanger and I were about as conspicuous as the buttons on Daly's underwear. Consequently, I had an excellent chance to size up our future antagonist in a leisurely manner.

His face was so long and thin that it reminded me of a horse's. At the lower end of it was a lantern jaw, and on the northern exposure smoothly brushed black hair came down in a V over his forehead. The part in the middle of his hair was so straight that it looked as if it had been laid out with a compass.

In between these features of his frontispiece, there was a pair of long, narrow, black eyes that slanted upward in Oriental fashion. His heavy black brows also slanted upward, and their outer corners were tilted northward at an even more extreme angle. Between them, two heavy furrows were spotted directly above a long thin nose which started out to jut forward at almost right angles to his face and then abandoned that determination to curve abruptly inward again. It was a parrot-like beak of dimensions which compared favorably with my own.

His wide, thin mouth was now clamped around a black cigar. His skin looked as if it had started out with a swarthy tinge and had been baked by the sun into a sort of yellowish mahogany. With those eyes and eyebrows, he looked as if he had a little sunburnt Chinese blood in him.

Somehow his silent approach sort of got under my skin. We all waited silently, Daly's face utterly emotionless. Cone was gazing at him unsmilingly, but somehow he gave the impression of a cat which has just accidentally run across a mouse drowning in cream.

Not a word did he say as he came closer with that assured, almost lounging air about him. The combination of city and frontier bad man which Sanger had mentioned was obvious. From greased hair to tan silk shirt, his appearance was that of a fop in sporting clothes. But that mahogany face and those Oriental eyes and that narrow-shouldered, long-legged, bony body were those of an outdoor man. His nails were manicured within an inch of their lives, but the long fingers and horny palms they sprang from had done a lot more than hold a chorus girl's hand. He wore a pair of rings with stones like twin searchlights.

I felt my spine quivering as Cone and Daly fought a battle of eyes.

"Well, well," he said finally, in a husky baritone, removing the cigar from his steel-trap mouth. "The Army's dropping in, eh? My name is Cone."

He stopped alongside the ship and leaned negligently against it, replacing his cigar in his mouth at a cocky angle and evidently feeling that he was in thorough control of the situation.

"I am Lieutenant Crane," the Duke said in his precise way. "Lieutenants Evans and McDowell, all of the Border

Patrol."

"I believe I've heard of you two, Cone said, his eyes flickering toward us with a little glow in their depths. "Crane's a new name to me on the Patrol, though."

"I just joined," Daly told him.

"I see," Cone said; and without the slightest change in the expression on his face, he nevertheless gave the impression of great inner amusement. "Who's in command?" he went on, and suddenly the deep furrows around his mouth and between his brows were deeper.

"I am," stated the Duke.

I felt as if something would go off with a loud report at any minute. There was all the peace and quiet of a chunk of dynamite just before the spark reaches it.

"Here on any special business?" Cone asked, betraying no satisfaction whatever at Daly's announcement.

"They've heard the town's getting pretty wild, and we're here to give it a look-over and see if it needs to be toned down any," Daly said in clipped phrases. "I am delighted to run across you so easily and so soon. Our understanding is that you're one of the leading citizens and business men of the town. I've no doubt that you and I can get together and fix things up quickly and with a minimum of trouble."

"No doubt at all," Cone agreed, his appraising eyes flickering over us with hard amusement.

"If it's agreeable to you," Daly said with uncanny calm, "I'd like to have a talk about the general situation immediately."

"Any time," Cone said.

He hadn't betrayed any sign of recognition of Daly, which was proof in itself to me of what he had in mind. That Daly hadn't batted an eye was undoubtedly an excellent ground for Cone's thinking that as far as he was concerned all was well.

"All right," snapped Daly; and for just a second his blue-gray eyes stared into mine with a surface glitter in them. I could fairly hear his brain humming as he went on tersely, "You two boys look over the town for an hour and see what you can see. Talk to Moreno at the Playground saloon. Meet me back here in two hours. By the way, sir," he went on, turning to the quiet Sanger, "there's no chance of hiring you to guard our ships, is there?"

My hair waved gently in this sudden change in plans. Sanger's mustache wiggled as he wondered quickly what to say.

"There's really no need of that," Cone said.

"I prefer to have them guarded," snapped Daly. "There's five bucks for two hours, mister."

"O.K. with me," Sanger said plaintively. "I reckon my man can keep my hot dogs from barking as well as I can."

When he got off his horse I noticed that he walked with a pronounced limp.

Cone, leaning against the ship like some dark Mephistopheles, jerked his thumb at the wing.

"I see you've got bombs aboard," he said, his eyes glowing into Daly's. "How come?"

"In case the town gets tough," Daly answered him. "These boom towns don't always like the law."

"You can't blame 'em," Cone said in a highly untroubled fashion. "All they want is to be let alone. As for me, though—" and for the first time his thin mouth widened in a sort of smile—"you've no idea how long I've been expecting this visit and how welcome you are."

"Thanks," the unsmiling Daly said.

Then he turned to us for a moment and said:

"All right, boys. Better get going. No chance of giving them a lift into town, is there, Mr. Cone?"

"Sure. I'll send for my car right away."

FIVE minutes later, as Daly disappeared into the house of his enemy, Lieutenants Slimuel X. Evans and Texas Q. McDowell were rolling toward town in a Rolls-Royce big enough to hold a reception in and with brass enough on it to make spittoons for all the hotel lobbies in the land. It was driven by an ape-like dude who looked about as much at home in his chauffeur's uniform as a chimpanzee would in a chemise.

"I wonder what Duke's idea was in leaving Sanger there," Tex said in low tones.

"Search me," I said, "but it's a cinch it's a good idea to have the ships taken care of. We might find ourselves a long way up Salt Creek without means of navigation if anything happened to 'em."

Talking in low tones, we crawled through the thickening traffic of the outskirts of Burley. We'd have had trouble overhauling a crippled snail as we reached the outskirts of that blazing square in the center of town. Traffic stayed stationary most of the time and traveled occasionally in six lanes over wide dirt roads which had been turned into rutted masses of sand and clay. Land scouts, well scouts, lease hounds, gamblers, roughnecks and dancehall women were everywhere. There were more gambling joints, dancehalls and saloons than there were stores; but all places of business, legitimate or illegitimate, were alike in that their doors were wide open and every light was on.

That square was four degrees lighter than day. The swarming people, half of them in various stages of drunkenness, seemed to be caught by crowd hysteria, to be driving themselves wild with the thought or the actuality of easy money. Hanging in the air was a heavy, not unpleasant, smell of petroleum.

"Where do youse gents want to go?" the charming gorilla in the front seat inquired out of the corner of his snaggle-toothed mouth.

Duke Daly had dropped a few more instructions into my ear before we left, so I said—

"To the Playground first."

The chauffeur nodded. Ten minutes later we had traveled the hundred and fifty yards or so which it took to reach a huge unpainted frame building, in the center of one side of the square.

Burley was a town of contrasts Tents nestled alongside two-story brick stores. The Rolls-Royce halted beside a lumber wagon as we dismounted on the sidewalks. Perfectly attired big company men rubbed shoulders with overalled, oil-drenched roughnecks. Just beyond the Playground was a little church—the only building along the street that wasn't doing a lot of business.

No sooner were we out of the car than it became obvious to me that we weren't destined for overwhelming popularity in Burley. People looked at us with unfriendly eyes. Wisecracks were thrown at us from four or five unidentified throats as we fought our way to the wide open doors of the two-story barn in front of us. The Playground, according to Daly, was the headquarters of Greasy Moreno, who was in charge of Mr. Cone's vice projects in Burley.

I KNOW a little bit about oil towns. During my frequent excursions, excitements and incarcerations therein, I have always made it a point to investigate the joints thereof for sociological reasons. Despite the fact that the Playground was a familiar combination of saloon, gambling house and what we'll call, in this refined circle, a dancehall, I stood in the doorway a minute and gazed upon the scene with considerable astonishment and not a little enjoyment.

The hum of that mighty town swept in through the doorway, and from the floor above came the sound of music and hundreds of shuffling feet, while before us there was stretched the big-

gest gambling house and the longest bar I had ever seen. No less than two dozen bartenders, sporting clean white coats, purveyed to nearly a thousand men lined four or five deep in front of a two-hundred-foot bar, which ran the entire length of the building on our right.

The customers were drinking as if they were afraid they might die before they got plastered. Fifteen feet in front of the bar a railing divided it from at least fifty gambling layouts which took up all the rest of the floor space in that building, one hundred feet wide and two hundred feet deep.

Every table, whether faro, craps, roulette, Klondike or poker, was filled to capacity. Two cashiers in metal cages were kept busier than bank cashiers during a run. Up in the ceiling above them were two openings, and through each one of those there was thrust the muzzle of a sub-machine gun.

Tex grinned.

"Now this is what I call a Playground," he drawled. "Let's have a drink."

Gamblers, croupiers and bartenders were starting to look at us now. Soon the variegated crowd in our vicinity gazed at us in unfriendly inspection of our uniforms. We ordered two drinks. I whispered into Tex's ear—

"I wonder whether it would be smart to try to get to Moreno?"

"I don't think so," he told me. "Did you see the glassy stare that barkeep gave us?"

"Hey, you, are you these Army officers?"

I'd been tapped none too lightly on the shoulder. I turned to meet a pair of shoebutton eyes glinting at me from the face of a middle-aged man who looked like a porter around the place.

"Yes," I said.

"Come with me. The boss wants to see you," he said without interest.

He proceeded forthwith to lead us up the narrow space between the railing and the bar-flies. As we made our way down the length of the place, a derisive cheer started from the front and was taken up by a hundred throats.

"Three cheers for the Army!" came a bull-like roar from somebody—and the loudest and longest Bronx cheer ever given to date made the Playground's walls shake.

I felt myself getting red. Tex's eyes were very bright, his face set.

"Listen," he said to me under cover of the shouted taunts and wisecracks, "this doesn't come under the heading of humor. These guys are sore!"

It was true. There was an ugly undertone to the shouting. I don't think I'm too easily scared, particularly when I have the protection of the uniform and the Patrol's reputation, but I wasn't at all sorry to pop through a door like a rabbit into its burrow and escape from that barrage of hostile noise.

"This isn't going to be any picnic," Tex said slowly. "There could be a mob scene in this place at the drop of a hat."

I nodded.

"It's the old story," I said. "We're supposed to be reformers, and they don't want to be reformed."

We were at the top of a long flight of steps. As we went down the hallway at the extreme rear of the building I got one glimpse through an open door of a dancehall that took up almost the entire space on that upper floor. At least three hundred couples were dancing.

Most of the women were attired in what the well dressed dancehall hostesses wore in the days of forty-nine, running to short skirts and very low necks. There was nothing to wonder about in that—it was my impression that both the women and the gowns had reached the zenith of their careers at about that year.

At the end of the dancehall our gray-headed, bowlegged guide threw open a door.

"Here they are," he said shortly. He stood aside for us to enter.

THE corner of the building had been partitioned off with rough planks. Behind the desk set at an angle in the corner between two windows, sat a short, portly, round-faced bird who was chewing a cigar the size of a small torpedo. It was terrifically hot. The smell of perspiring bodies swept in from the dancehall and made the air so thick you could hang your hat on it.

It was no wonder that Mr. Greasy Moreno had his coat off and that his loud silk shirt was soaking wet beneath his unbuttoned vest, or that drops of water were rolling down his swarthy face in a good imitation of Niagara Falls. Nevertheless these features added nothing to his attractiveness as he sat there like a toad and looked at us with protruding brown eyes underneath puffy eyelids.

"What are you guys around here for?" he demanded, his thick lips scarcely moving.

"We wanted a drink and we got it," I told him, sniffing the polluted air with distaste and looking at him with annoyance.

Greasy, curly black hair was plastered down above his round, fat face. His battered ears stuck forth like an elephant's. A diamond big enough to do duty as a beacon blazed from one fat finger; another was stuck in his bright blue tie. The collar of his shirt was limp and wet, and it hemmed in his neck so tightly that folds of flesh fell over it.

"What do you want?" Tex inquired gently.

"I want you boids to get out of my jernt and stay out!" he snapped in a high, husky voice; and from his accent we knew at once that he had been spawned in New York and spewed into Texas straight from Hell's Kitchen.

For a moment Tex and I just looked at him. There were battle flags flying in McDowell's tanned cheeks. The little experience I'd gone through downstairs plus what Mr. Moreno had to say were not calculated to draw honeyed words from the uncertain tempered Mr. Evans either.

"Suppose we want to stay here?" I asked.

"You'll get thrown out of here on your ear if you even stop on your way out," he snarled, his cigar cocked upward at an annoying angle.

Something seemed to snap inside me. I had just poised for a spring forward to knock that cigar down Moreno's throat when I felt Tex's steadying hand on my wrist. Before I could make a move the outwardly tranquil Southerner was drawling gently—

"You don't care much about the law, do you?"

"Law, hell!" came that high, husky voice welling up from somewhere deep in the flesh. "You're the Army; you ain't the law!"

"So?" said Tex with that deceptive gentleness. "You may find out differently, especially if Mr. Cone visits you."

"Don't give me that stuff!" Moreno spat contemptuously, and just at that second a great light seemed to illumine the processes of what I jokingly call my brain.

I didn't exactly know what I saw in the situation, but I knew there was more than met the eye.

"Now listen, you guys," Moreno went on, leaning forward on fat elbows with the ash of his cigar even with his left eye. "I don't give a damn about Frank Cone or all the tin soldiers this side of Canada. I've made my dough. I've run a fair and square business. And I'm leavin' this town Monday anyway. I ain't got no use nor time for any snoopin' blankety-blanks, and as long as this is my place I'm gonna run it to suit myself and the law in Burley. I ain't lettin' anybody I don't want step foot in the door, understand? I ain't no sap. If I didn't know where I sit, do you think I'd be tellin' you to get the hell out of here instead of slippin' you a grand or so to let me alone?"

Which pregnant peroration was part

and parcel of a few maverick thoughts that had been coursing through my mind. If Frank Cone and all his crooked enterprises had every reason to avoid the enmity of the Border Patrol or any other law enforcement agencies, just why in hell was one of Frank Cone's men deliberately trying to rub our fur the wrong way? He was just begging for trouble.

"You seem pretty sure of yourself," I told him.

"I know what I'm doin'," he told me belligerently. "And I'll tell you another thing. It don't mean nothin' to me any more, but this town knows what it wants and what it's doin' and it ain't asked for no outsiders to tell it how to run itself. There are a lot of rough boys around here that know what it's all about, and you boids better scram—and quick!"

"What would you say," I inquired as casually as I could, "if we were to scram and take you with us?"

"Don't make me laugh," he sneered. "If you think you can get away with it, try it and see."

There could be no doubt in the world about it. Mr. Greasy Moreno was sitting behind his desk trying his damndest to promote a fight. It was a trap into which I'd nearly put my number twelve foot beyond the shadow of a doubt. Suddenly I turned to Tex.

"I've found out all I need to know, if you have," I said. "Let's go."

Tex nodded, but his eyes were full of pitiful pleading. His fists were clenched at his sides. I knew he'd have given quite a few of the best years of his life for one sock at Moreno.

"The quicker you get home to your mothers the better, boys," gibed Moreno as we went out the door. "And, remember, don't stop on your way out!"

AS IF to see to it that we didn't stop, two men, one in overalls and cowboy boots and the other in a stained blue suit, fell in behind us as we emerged from the door at the foot of the stairs and the glitter and noise of the bar and gambling room hit us in a wave of maudlin sound. I've never felt my tail as low between my legs as I did while Tex and I fairly sneaked through the crowd to the door, followed by the two loungers who had been waiting at the foot of the steps.

Neither one of us said a word until we got out on the sidewalk and fought our way to the side of the Rolls-Royce. Mad as I was, it seemed to me significant that Cone's car was allowed to park directly in front of the Playground in spite of the no-parking signs.

"What do you suppose would have happened to us if we'd smacked that guy?" I asked Tex.

"I'll be damned if I know," he answered me absently. "If he was going to use it as an excuse to bump us off or beat us up, it would still be silly. He and Cone both know what that would mean—that the whole damn patrol would come and clean up with or without orders. And Cone's up talking to the Duke right now and thinking that he hasn't got a thing to worry about!"

"Well, Moreno had some plan in his mind," I insisted. "There isn't anybody in the world as tough as he talked and nobody in the world with that little sense. Why, that kind of chatter is even too silly to scare a private detective!"

"Shut up!" Tex said quickly. "Those two *hombres* that followed us have got something on their minds."

The older man, who was the one in the overalls and cowboy boots, lifted his battered hat respectfully as he took his stance on wide-spread legs in front of us. Behind him his squat companion waited as if for orders.

" 'Scuse me, fellows," he said through his unkempt mustache. "I'm Sam Austin. I work for Frank Cone; in fact, I'm his head tool pusher. He called up a few minutes ago and says for me and Jim here to ride out to his house with you boys. We spotted the car and waited inside for you."

The events of the afternoon and evening had got me to the point where I was seeing sixguns in stones, corpses in running brooks and evil in everything.

"Sure, jump right in," I returned. As I said it I was as sure that the sad-looking Sam and the tobacco-chewing Jim had definite plans concerning us as I was that Greasy Moreno had been acting for our benefit up in the office. One look at McDowell and the Texan and I had a complete understanding.

"Get in the front seat, Mr. Austin," I said as both men made a concerted move for the rear pew.

"Oh—er—uh—certainly," he said mildly after a brief hesitation and planted himself alongside the driver.

That chauffeur could have made a good living for himself hiring out his face to scare people at night.

With Tex and myself ensconced to port and starboard of the square-faced, much-scarred Jim, the Rolls-Royce started its crawl back to its stable.

We crept on down the north side of the square in the direction in which the car had been headed. As we got to one corner the driver turned south instead of north, proceeding down the west boundary of the heart of Burley.

"Where the hell are we going?" I inquired. "We want to go back to Cone's house."

"I know what I'm doin'," growled the driver, and I let it go at that for the moment.

"Who belongs to that ship I saw near Cone's house?" I asked Jim chattily.

"It's Frank's ship," he told me.

There was something dull and stodgy about him; he seemed to be interested in little or nothing, including himself. He had more grease on his clothes than Cone and Moreno had on their hair.

"Is he a flyer?" I inquired.

"No, I fly him," he yawned.

He had all the life and sparkle of a piece of putty.

"I suppose with all his interests he has to hop around plenty fast," Tex said easily as our driver proceeded to propel our gaudy go-cart straight south. We were leaving the bedlam which was the square behind us, and were on our way to the outskirts of town on a course which was diametrically opposite to the way we wanted to go.

"Listen here, chauffeur," I yelped as the tents and shacks and houses started to thin out and civilization, except for roughnecks on derrick floors, was dropping behind us, "you're going the wrong way!"

"Are you trying to tell me what I'm doing?" he snarled.

I suppose that down underneath I was in a very frazzled and supersensitive condition. I was in a mood to examine my own face carefully in a mirror before admitting that I was myself.

"O.K, Tex," I yelled, and at the same instant I leaped from the seat, leaned against the side door and had my gun poked into the driver's back.

"Now stop this car, damn you, while we have a talk!" I snapped.

As I said that Tex trained his gun on Jim in the back seat. Our move had been so sudden that it seemed to stun our three companions. The driver jammed on the brakes and the Rolls-Royce stopped so suddenly, swinging into a deep rut at the same time, that both Tex and I were thrown forward until we were half sprawled over the front seat. The gorilla behind the wheel turned like a flash and with hands like the paws of a bear grabbed me around the neck and jerked my head down.

In that same instant I saw a blackjack appear in Austin's hand and descend on Tex's unprotected head. It staggered him. As I writhed in the clutches of the driver, striving to get my gun around where it would be of some use, Jim started to wrest it from me. Just as Austin's blackjack was swinging for Tex's head again and the driver's terrible grip was making my eyes pop and my tongue hang out, Tex fired almost blindly. Behind me Jim groaned and the grasp on my gun was released.

I was hanging over the front seat, my

head practically on the cushions. My neck felt as if it was in the grip of a boa constrictor. My hand was hanging down over the back of the seat, the gun still in it, as Tex went down under the second blow of Austin's blackjack. A second later, red spots dancing before my eyes and my lungs laboring for air, I brought the gun up and sent a bullet through Austin.

WE WERE on the very outskirts of the town. People were running toward us now from vehicles which were lined up behind the Rolls-Royce. Others were popping out of tents and buildings. Tex, reeling on his feet, was up now; his gun was still in his hand.

"Let go and drive before I knock you kicking!" he snarled to the gorilla who was throttling me.

With a blistering curse the driver obeyed orders. The Rolls-Royce leaped ahead. For the next two minutes I saw the best driving it had ever been my lot to witness. That Rolls-Royce swayed, bumped and staggered over a road made up of ruts and ridges that would make the Grand Canyon look like the Indianapolis Speedway. We were going sixty miles an hour if a foot, and I bounced between rear seat and roof like a rubber ball.

"I think Austin's dead," I yelled to the blazing Texan.

On the floor of the Rolls-Royce Jim was groaning.

"I don't know but what I'd rather be dead than taking this ride if I was wounded," Tex remarked as we reached down and hauled Jim up on the seat between us.

He was shot through the side, and it seemed to be a painful but not serious wound. I leaned forward and poked my gun in the crouched driver's back.

"You know where you're going? To Cone's house," I snarled.

He nodded.

We had outdistanced all pursuit as he serpentined our ornate barouche along winding roads in a general northerly direction. We were roaring along on a curved course through a forest of derricks on the floors of most of which grimy roughnecks were working the night shift. They were like so many demons in the wan illumination of derrick lights plus the occasional red glow from the mouths of boilers.

"Both of them had blackjacks," Tex said, his face one wide grin and his eyes a couple of glowing coals.

It was minutes such as had just passed which made life semi-passable to Lieutenant Texas Q. McDowell.

"We were being taken for a ride." I told him, "Good Lord, Jim here hasn't even got a gun on."

"They didn't want to shoot us."

"They wanted to knock us out for some peculiar reason." Tex nodded. "I'll be damned if between Greasy Moreno and the blackjack twins here this hasn't got me dizzy."

"Got anything to say for yourself, Jim?" I inquired of the groaning pilot. "You know where you're going to, don't you? You might as well talk and save yourself as much as possible."

"I'll take my chances," he rasped. "Geez, ain't you guys gonna get me a doctor?"

"When we get time, we will," I told him.

I knew instantly that it was useless to try to make him talk.

"Funny pair," Tex commented. "I'll swear that Moreno, this driver and Jim are slum rats from the city. Austin is a Southerner."

WE APPROACHED the Cone domicile. It was visible on the hilltop half a mile away. Some of its windows were lighted, and the derrick which shared the hilltop was a dim cone of light against the night. It was funny how the effect of raw life and terrific energy which Burley gave forth was increased somehow by darkness. There wasn't the slightest slackening of hectic

toil; thousands of men and mines were straining at top speed.

"I wonder how the Duke got along?" I said absently as my thoughts suddenly reverted to the blond ex-gambler who was being offered as a human sacrifice to the Satan of Burley.

"He can take care of himself in any company," Tex remarked. He leaned forward. "Drive to the ships and not to the house," he told our silent driver, and that unappetizing thug nodded shortly.

As we stopped at a point fifty yards from the field on a side road, I was still as far from any intelligent idea about the reason for the town of Burley's insane antics as I had been an hour before.

I saw Duke Daly get up from a reclining position on the grass and gaze inquiringly at the car.

"Come on, driver," I commanded, "and help us carry these guys."

Tex yelled to Daly to come over to the car. The slim old-young Federal man gazed long at the unconscious Austin and the groaning Jim.

"What happened?" he asked quietly.

When we told him he whirled on the driver savagely.

"Are you talking?" he snapped.

"What d'ya tink I am, crazy?" the driver spat back.

"Well, we can't be bothered with you birds then," snapped Daly.

His move was as fast as light. I did not even see his gun come out; and the driver didn't have a chance to duck as it smashed down on his skull with vicious force. He couldn't have dropped quicker if he'd been hit with a trip-hammer.

"Come over here for a minute," Daly told us after we quickly laid our three victims in a neat line.

We walked a few feet away, and he said in low tones—

"Have you seen Sanger?"

We shook our heads.

"Well, I was with Cone for two hours. When I came back, Sanger was gone."

"That's funny," Tex said, a lambent glow in his eyes.

"It's more than funny when you know John Sanger," Daly said evenly. "He never left of his own accord without telling me. Something happened to him."

"How are the ships?" I asked quickly.

"In perfect shape," Daly answered without emotion. "That makes it all the more peculiar."

"Wait a minute!" I exploded suddenly as my stuttering mind gave forth a spark. "A glimmer is germinating within me. What happened with Cone, Duke?"

For a minute Daly didn't answer. He was looking at the white house on the hill, its back yard screened by a row of trees, a couple of its windows lighted. There in the darkness, with our three captives, we all stood pondering. The subdued roar of the town washed against my ears with the relentless continuity of surf. The exultation which always results from fast and furious action backfired on me, and I was conscious of a feeling of helpless depression as I gazed at Daly's handsome profile.

"Something that may interest you," he finally said with slow irrelevance, "is that I tried to call up McMullen and was informed that the telephone and telegraph wires out of town were both out of commission."

"Huh?" I grunted.

He nodded.

"That's the situation," he said.

"That settles it then," I said. "Before I emit any words of wisdom, though, what happened with Cone?"

"What I expected," Daly said quietly. "He didn't admit anything, but he told me to lay off and get out of town, giving Burley a clean bill of health, or my past career would be sent out over the A.P. I agreed to meet his terms. I even asked for five thousand dollars, which he refused to give me."

"Then we're set in that quarter?" Tex asked gently.

"That's the hell of it," came the Duke's level voice. "I don't believe

that slant-eyed son-of-a-gun believed me or that he takes any stock in what I promised him."

"Now listen, everybody," I broke in. "I believe I've got the lay."

"Wait a minute." Daly stopped me, his voice curiously vibrant.

The hum of a speeding motor car cut through the undertone of sound which was characteristic of Burley; and a second later, with my muscles stiffening and my nerves jumping, I saw a battered car dash up to Cone's house. A man tumbled out of it as if being a second late would mean his doom. He rushed into the house, leaving the driver waiting at the wheel.

"SOME one's in a hurry," I observed. "Can I go on?"

Daly nodded.

"I thought it might be Sanger," he said quietly.

"Now, look," I said. "Cone, you say, doesn't seem to believe that you'll play with him. Moreno, his right hand man, insults us all over the place and talks like the villain in a tent company melodrama. Two guys, one of them a flyer, try to take Tex and me for a ride and don't even have a gun on them in case anything goes wrong. They just want to knock us out. Telephone and telegraph lines are suddenly out of commission. Here's what I think:

"For various reasons, with us coming here as a climax, Cone and his gang figure that they can't get away with much very much longer in Burley. They're getting too hot. I figure that the objective of Moreno was to get us into a fight, knock us out, kidnap us, anything to get us out of the way and to clear the decks for action. They've monkeyed with the telephone and telegraph wires so that no outside help can come into this remote town during the night. They don't give a damn about making us sore, because the big shots don't even expect to be in these parts longer than tomorrow. Boys, I'll bet ten to one that they're going to make one last lunge at big dough tonight and call it quits."

"Sounds sensible," Daly agreed. "I think we'd better transport our three prisoners to McMullen along with Cone. One of us can carry two in the back seat. But I've got to find out about Sanger—"

Daly stopped as a man emerged from the shelter of the trees behind Cone's house and came hurrying toward us.

"Looks like the sheriff," he said. "He's crooked as a corkscrew. Maybe he's after you two boys."

"To hell with him," I remarked elegantly. "Say, listen, if Sanger had some trouble it must mean that they know who he is—"

"That's just what I'm worried about," Daly admitted. "There's another thing that may knock your analysis of the situation completely cockeyed, Slim. It seems to me that if your theory about their getting their last haul tonight—rob the banks or something—is correct, one of their first moves would be to put our ships out of commission so that we couldn't get into the air and stop anything or pursue them. If they got Sanger, they'd have kicked in the wings or something—"

"Throw up your hands, the hull bunch o' you!" came a bull-like roar from the man who was galloping toward us.

He had two long-barreled, old-fashioned guns, one in each paw, and the ends of his mustache were streaming in the breeze.

"Quit kidding, Sheriff," I admonished him. "What does Frank Cone want us for?"

The big black-shirted old-timer of a sheriff, who was possessed of a close-set pair of small and much inflamed peepers, planted himself five feet away from us, his gun waving. He was more than a little tipsy.

"Get 'em up!" he rumbled. "I'm tellin' you I'm serious. I ain't exactly certain whether I can arrest you or not, but I've got the drop on you and we'll fight it out while you're in jail!"

"He's a little drunk, boys," Daly said

with icy contempt in his voice. "Let's put 'em up for the minute."

"What does Frank Cone want us arrested for?" I repeated as we negligently thrust our arms northward.

I'll never forget the feeling that came over me as the shaken sheriff took a deep breath and said dazedly—

"If Frank Cone was alive, he'd want Daly here, alias Crane, arrested for his murder and the other two of you as material witnesses or accomplices or both!"

For a second the scene was a tableau.

"Good Lord," breathed Tex as he and I turned unbelieving eyes on Daly. He stared back at us without a trace of expression in his marble face. As his dark gray eyes stared into mine there was no suffering in them, no surprise; then suddenly they were as bright as stars. A grin of pure boyishness garnished the Duke's usually mask-like face.

"You don't tell me that Frank Cone has been killed?" he said slowly.

"Shot, cut up, burned and buried in quicklime in his own back yard within the last hour," said the sheriff.

We were like so many statues. So Duke Daly had killed Cone—but why hadn't he told us?

"Did you do it, Duke?" I asked without thinking.

"Of course not," he said calmly.

"The hell you didn't!" snorted the sheriff. "There was only one other man in the house today—his chink. You're the only man that's been in the house this afternoon. His chink never seen Cone from the time he left to go marketin', leaving you with him, until he seen his body buried in the back yard. The roughnecks on that well would have noticed anybody else coming in or out, so we got an open-and-shut case. Army officer or no Army officer, you ain't got a chance to get out of this!"

"All right," snapped Daly. "Now listen, Sheriff Meeker; I know that you were in Cone's pay and that you're the crookedest sheriff Texas ever had. I've got more on you than the Government had on Tea Pot Dome. You don't need to worry about your prisoners, but you're going to give us all the leeway we want. The first thing is that we're going to look over the lay of the land up at the house and see if we can find out what really happened."

"No such thing," snarled the half-drunken Meeker, his eyes glittering blankly with liquor and his mouth drooling. "Give me your guns."

"Here they are," snapped Daly, and we followed his lead and handed over our Colts.

"Now," Daly said contemptuously, "we'll see what it's all about."

WITHOUT a word we turned and started for the house.

"Stay where you are!" blared the sheriff, firing a volley of blasphemy.

Daly whirled on him.

"We're going up to the house," he said very quietly. "Try to stop us. For ten bucks you'd let us fly away!"

The sheriff hesitated. It may sound funny, but in a way I felt sorry for him. He didn't have the courage of his own convictions—if he had any convictions.

"Come on," Daly said, and we resumed our trek.

"He can't seem to make up his mind whether to be tough or not," I remarked.

"He's a sample of Frank Cone blight," Daly said. "Don't mind him. He's taken Cone's dough so long that he's just a drunken crook who talks loud one minute and licks your boots the next."

"It struck me that he was bluffing at first—"

"And is scared of us underneath." Daly nodded. "In my opinion, he crawls to us like he did just now because he knows in his heart that he's wrong and we're in the right. He doesn't dare stick to his ground, because his ground is false."

"But there's the body, he says—"

"Even so, we're Border Patrolmen, aren't we? He's a drunken sheriff who knows in his heart he's a crook—even if he is right this particular time—and that we know it, doesn't he? I just told him so, if he had any doubts. He's more than half-scared of us, even if he does really believe I killed Cone."

"You didn't get in a fight with that guy and knock him off—honest now?" Tex asked gently.

"Of course not," Daly repeated. "If I had I wouldn't cut him up or try to burn him and then bury him in quicklime. And listen—if the sheriff isn't talking through his hat, we've got no business being here all by ourselves. I haven't taken my eyes off that house since I came out of it. Nobody has gone in or out of the place so far as I can tell, although they might have come in from the back yard. The main thing is this: Anybody who had guts enough to kill Frank Cone has guts enough to put us out of the way for good and all if he wants to. Our uniforms don't mean a damned thing alongside of what Cone's organization means to the underworld."

"It might have been some nut that did it personally and not as a business matter," I pointed out. "Anyway, Duke, you may be in kind of a mess."

"We'll see," he said quietly; and about one minute later we did see—plenty.

For some unknown reason Sheriff Meeker suddenly changed his front. In fact, with a look in his eye that I didn't like, he was almost grinning as he caught up with us and said:

"All right, I guess you got a right to know why you're being arrested. I'll show you the whole works."

His watery eyes were glinting with triumph as he led the way through a beautifully furnished reception hall at the front of the house and on into a large room which caused me to whistle in amazement. The carpet was so soft and deep that a short man would have smothered in it. Above the filled bookshelves, which extended three-quarters of the way to the ceiling, there were about six original paintings which weren't at all tough to look at. The furniture was solid and highly polished. The room breathed dignified luxury.

"Well I'll be damned!" I remarked. "This Cone was a man of parts."

"Is this or is it not the room where you and Cone talked?" brayed the sheriff.

"It is," said Daly.

"I ain't moved a thing," the sheriff went on weightily. "See this here andiron all splotched up with blood? See this here spot on the carpet? See that there overturned smoking stand and that broken lampshade?"

The details he mentioned were not hard to perceive. There was a splotch of blood on the carpet almost a foot in diameter. The bloody andiron with a few hairs stuck in the caked blood on its tip told a grisly story: It had unquestionably sunk deep into some human being's skull.

Daly picked it up and looked at it. The hair stuck in the caked blood was black.

"Follow me," ordered the sheriff, staggering slightly. "Thought you cleaned up all the blood, but you didn't. See this here splotch in the dinin' room? And look at the kitchen floor. One spot over by the stove there."

He led us on into the tree-screened back yard between the house and the garage. In the center of a small garden in which a few discouraged vegetables were trying to grow was a hole about three feet deep in the dry loam. In the center of it was a ghastly bunch of charred bones, and from the middle of them something glowed as the sheriff threw his flashlight on it.

I stooped over to look closer.

"Don't touch anything until the coroner comes," blared Meeker. "That's Cone's watch. I can identify it myself."

I was down on my hands and knees, as were also Daly and McDowell. Care-

less of the sheriff's injunction, I was scraping the awful heap with a stick.

"There's that diamond ring of his," Tex said in low tones as the huge diamond suddenly glittered forth at us as we turned over the pile.

Then suddenly Daly grasped my hand so tight that I nearly yelled. The sheriff was teetering over us, leering triumphantly, treating himself to a snort of booze from a pocket-flask and a snort of triumph which he blasted forth from his thick nose.

I LOOKED up at Daly. His face had hardened into stone. There was a look of tragic bewilderment in his eyes as they met mine and then shifted to Tex.

"You two get up and hide me for a minute. Talk to the sheriff," he commanded in a tense whisper.

Dumbly we scrambled to our feet.

"No doubt it was Cone," I said loudly as we came in front of Meeker. "I recognized his ring myself, but the Duke here didn't do it—"

"Here, here, what you doin'?" the sheriff interrupted as he stepped around me.

"Nothing, sheriff," Daly said with a sort of deadly calm. He was getting to his feet and dusting off his hands.

"Thought I seen you sticking your hand in there," the sheriff said suspiciously.

"All right, boys. Blood in the room where Daly and Cone talked; Daly the only man that seen him this afternoon; his remains found out here—you're going to have a tough time convincing any jury—"

"Hello, sheriff, I've been lookin' for you all over," came a hail from the back porch. A tall, scrawny, spectacled gent, sporting a huge curve-stemmed pipe below a bony face strode rapidly toward us.

"Hello, Macy," the sheriff greeted him. "Now here's a story that is a story."

"Who is he?" I barked as I watched the sharp-nosed gentleman approach. He was wearing a disreputable soft hat; the hollows beneath his cheekbones were deep red.

"He's the press association man," Meeker told us importantly.

Sharp little eyes sparkled at us through Macy's rimless eyeglasses. His huge ears seemed to be cocked forward alertly. His inquisitive nose was wrinkling as he fairly sniffed his story.

"Pretty fair, pretty fair," he said briskly. "Which one is Daly, alias Crane?"

"I am."

"Just heard of this murder downtown, and Moreno told me he had all the dope about you and Cone. Is it true that you were once a professional gambler, are now a Federal operative and not an Army officer at all—and that Cone had proof that you killed a man—"

"Now wait a minute," I interrupted, damming the Niagara of words. Macy had rattled off his questions like a machine gun in full operation. "Not a word of this gets printed, understand."

"The hell you say!" chattered Macy without rancor. "Every damn word of it gets printed. Now, Mr. Daly, according to Mr. Moreno, the late Mr. Cone had evidence of all your past indiscretions, so to speak, and he believed that they undoubtedly supply the motive for the fight between you two. You'll plead self-defence, I presume—"

"You seem very sure that I'll plead to anything," Daly said icily.

Suddenly Macy cocked one ear toward the house.

"Listen," he said abruptly.

"A lot of motors," Daly said quickly. "A bunch of cars are coming this way and coming fast."

"I'm not surprised," Macy said with chipper satisfaction. "Cone was pretty popular around here, and a lot of men of one kind or another worked for him and depended on him for plenty. There was a lot of excitement downtown when the news spread. I imagine that there

will be a lot of people around here before long."

"Hell!" Tex said, his eyes widening. "Listen, Duke, Slim and I damn near got mobbed in the Playground. You're likely to be lynched!"

Cars stopped in front of the house. The noise of loud voices carried over the drone of oncoming cars. I whirled on the sheriff.

"We've got to get the hell out of here, quick," I snapped. "You've got to help us protect Daly."

"Where is the dirty killer?" roared a voice from somewhere within the house.

The noise of tramping feet and drunken curses and threats came through the opened rear windows to where we stood uncertainly in the garden. From the front of the house came the growing noise of an ever-increasing mob. I didn't need to get a look at the gathering throng which, so to speak, was conducting a picnic to the grave. I could visualize well enough the half drunken, overwrought, hard-boiled crowd.

"Come on," Daly said tersely without any sign of emotion in his face or voice. "We'll get to the ships. The mob will make for them—"

"You ain't moving," blared the sheriff, leering triumphantly. "Ships, my eye! You're stickin' with me—"

As the front guard of the surging mob came through the back door and out over the porch and others came round both sides, my fist hit the side of Meeker's jaw. As he dropped I yelled.

"Good luck, boys!" Macy said facetiously as we scurried toward the fence.

The mob was in full cry as they saw our shadowy forms. From the front of the house a deep menacing growl rose like the cry of a pack of hounds on the trail.

"You publish a word about Daly and we'll have a lynching party of our own!" I shouted to Macy as we sped toward the field we'd landed on.

"My, my!" he yelled mockingly.

Even at that moment, running for our lives down that sloping field toward the ships which by some miracle were entirely undisturbed and which the mob seemed not to have noticed, I remember thinking, "There isn't a chance for Duke to get out of this clean now."

"We haven't got a chance to get into the air," Daly said through clenched teeth.

A HUNDRED yards behind us the mob came on in full cry. I knew that those roughnecks were yelling for Daly's blood. They weren't entirely animated by spontaneous resentment at the murder of their distinguished fellow-citizen and leading thug, either. That mob had been steamed up deliberately. Its nucleus was as synthetic as native gin, and it had gathered to itself a certain number of oil town habitués who were ready for trouble at any time and whom it had been easy to arouse against the uniformed men who were there to spoil their fun.

"We'll use our back seat guns!" Tex gasped.

"I hope they stop," I prayed.

"If they don't, Lord help 'em!" Tex panted grimly as he threw himself into the back seat of the first De Haviland.

I took the second one and Daly the third.

"All together!" I yelped. "Over their heads!"

The next second sprays of bullets hummed and sang above the heads of the mob. The front rank stopped abruptly as they saw the red spots dancing in front of our guns. Those in the rear pushed forward. Once again the deadly rat-a-tat-tat of three machine guns became audible above the angry voices of the crowd.

They stopped in a tangled mass, milling around uncertainly; and it was then that I leaped up on the seat of my ship and extended my six feet six into the air.

"Keep quiet," I bellowed through my

cupped hands, "or we'll mow you all down!"

Our three powerful arguments swinging alertly on their scarf mounts carried the day for the moment. I could see Greasy Moreno in the vanguard of our antagonists, and even he didn't seem to have any appetite for an attack.

"Well, there's only one thing to do," I said to Tex and Daly. "We've got to start these ships fast and get gone from here. This is a lynching party and no mistake! Two of us can man the guns while the other one starts the motors—"

"You're right!" Daly nodded. He seemed like a man in a trance. "But I'm going to stay here and circle around this house while you two radio McMullen and Laredo for a bunch of ships."

"Why stay here?" I demanded. "If your motor cuts out you'll have to come down, and you'll be strung up as sure as hell."

"Somebody's got to stay," snapped Daly, "because Frank Cone is not dead!"

"What do you mean?" Tex said swiftly.

All of us were swinging our heads to right and left to make sure that no one approached from any direction. Out in front of us the mob was standing uncertainly while Greasy Moreno harangued them about something or other.

For a moment Daly didn't answer. He was standing in the rear cockpit of his ship, slim and straight and motionless, his face set grimly. Despite my utter astonishment at his last statement, nevertheless my mind's eye was seeing sample headlines: "Federal Agent Exposed as Ex-criminal. Murder of Prominent Oil Man Reveals Hectic Past." There would be dozens of those. Fifteen years of anguished effort to rehabilitate himself would be gone for naught as far as Duke Daly was concerned.

"Come on, Duke, what's on your mind?" Tex yelled, his voice vibrant.

"Those bones were John Sanger's," Daly said evenly.

"How do you know they were?" I asked unbelievingly.

"Did you notice his limp?" Daly asked thoughtfully.

I nodded.

"He once told me that he'd got some shrapnel in his knee in the war and that the doctors had had to wire the joint together," he went on, as if thinking three jumps beyond what he was saying.

"Well?" I prompted him.

"I saw two pieces of bone in that heap that were wired together."

"But," I protested, "it was Cone's watch and his ring and the remains of his belt—"

"And there was blood in the library and some of Cone's hair was stuck to the andiron," Daly finished for me. "All of it means that Mr. Frank Cone went to great lengths to make it seem that I had murdered him and he was gone for good and all."

"But why?" I asked.

"Probably for just one reason," Daly said in clipped phrases. "He must have got wise to the fact that Sanger was a Secret Service man. I told you that I didn't think he believed that I'd go through with the proposition of covering him up. He just figured the jig was up as far as he was concerned, with Secret Service men like Sanger having been here for weeks and with me a Federal man coming in to cash in on the evidence. What could be sweeter from his point of view than to be supposedly murdered? There would never be any alarm out for him, no pursuit, and he could retire without a worry on his mind."

"And he got rid of Sanger because he found out who he was and because he needed a corpse," Tex said quickly.

"What a layout! And then they have it all fixed up for this mob scene with a logical excuse to get rid of Daly and probably you and me as well, Tex," I said.

"You must be right," Tex said, "if you're correct about Sanger's joint. They deliberately put Cone's jewelry there, of course."

"They must have murdered Sanger while you were talking to Cone."

Daly nodded, his face emotionless.

"And if I'm not wrong," he said with a sort of deadly calm, "Frank Cone may be hiding right in his own house this minute. He built it himself, and it's ten to one that there are one or two secret rooms where a man could hide."

"I'll tell you what let's do," I said, my fingers writhing with the desire to get a hold on Cone's neck. "Let's get into the air, drop a note warning everybody to stay away from the house and see if bombing gets any result."

"We can radio for help while we just circle around," Tex agreed. "If Cone is alive, one or two of his men must have knocked off Sanger here while you were talking and got him in from this side where the roughnecks on that well couldn't see them. But if you've been here all the time since you left the house—and it must have taken some time to cut up the body and do everything—and neither you nor the roughnecks saw anybody, Cone himself and the murderers of Sanger must be hiding in the house."

"I'm positive of it," Daly said. "I'll be damned if I don't believe Sheriff Meeker as well as Moreno and others know all about it. We'll do what Slim suggests— Good Lord!"

The exclamation with which he had broken off was like a prayer which I could barely hear. Then for a moment I forgot all about Frank Cone, as did the crowd waiting fifty yards away from us. A vast roar made speech impossible for a moment. It seemed that all hell had let loose. Pouring upward into the sky from a well behind Cone's house appeared a great plume of oil tossing itself over the hundred-and-twelve-foot crown block. Then, scarcely two seconds later, that plume became a cloud of rolling black smoke shot with red.

THE countryside was visible through a hideous red glow.

"She must have blown in unexpectedly, forced the drill stem out of the hole, and a spark set her afire," I said.

The crowd was streaming toward the scene now as the most horrible and all too frequent hazard of the oil game suddenly reared its head and threatened to destroy Burley and the oil pool. We were at least four hundred yards away from it, yet the heat of that gargantuan torch flaming red against the sky was noticeable.

"Let's go now!" I bellowed. "I've got an idea!"

I was so sore at the town of Burley and Frank Cone that at the moment I'd have given an arm or a leg to have him where I wanted him. Consequently such little matters as being afraid of anything or anybody were forgotten as I outlined my scheme.

"We'll be ace-high if it can be done," I told the nonplused flyers. "You guys start the ships while I write the note."

"Wait a minute!" snapped Daly. "That's a pretty good idea if you can get away with it. Let's release the chauffeur and give him the dope."

"O.K!" I yelled. "Somebody go get him."

Daly went while Tex and I started the three twelve-cylinder Liberty motors. The voice of the four-hundred-horsepower Liberty could barely be heard above the steady, earth-shaking roar of the well's escaping gas. The fire started about twelve feet above the mouth of the well—the gas has to expand before it catches fire. The derrick had been completely consumed already, and all Burley was covered with a low-hanging cloud of black smoke which, over the well, glowed red.

I was in the rear seat of my De Haviland, helmet and goggles on, as Daly came running back.

I could see the chauffeur making all speed with his message. The crowd had disappeared now from our vicinity

and was up alongside the house, gazing in awe at the conflagration.

No one tried to interfere with me as I took off, sending the ship downhill and taking the air at a safe distance from the fence at the lower end. Behind me, Tex and Daly followed in file. I had no sooner banked around and started climbing my ship than the scrambled mess of emotions, most of them murderous, within me quieted as I got a look at the smoke-screened panorama below me.

It seemed that every living soul in Burley was out in the open. It was a sea of white faces. Panic seemed to have seized the town there at the foot of the slope on which the well was blazing. Already little streams of burning oil were advancing toward the flimsy shacks and sun-baked tents which were a set-up for a bonfire.

At the foot of the slope one of six great fifty-five-thousand-barrel oil tanks was already afire. I could see that it wouldn't be long before the layer of water which always sinks to the bottom of a tank would start to boil as the oil burned down to it. When that happens the water boils up through the oil, the tank overflows and there's hell to pay. Instinctively I knew that if that fire wasn't put out within a few minutes Burley would start to blaze. Thousands of people were pouring toward the well from town as I straightened my ship six hundred feet high and half a mile south of the well.

The smoke was stinging my nostrils and lungs already, and it was worse than flying through fog. I flew directly for the well until the smoke and the heat became too much for me. My eyes were watering and my lungs laboring as perhaps three hundred yards from the swirling red whirlpool of smoke and flame, I shoved the throttle all the way on and nosed the De Haviland down.

The people near the well were waiting as if turned to stone. To the west, Daly and Tex were circling watchfully. From all the derrick floors of that far-flung field, the roughnecks were pouring toward the scene to see if they could help, but as I started into my dive most of them seemed to stop as if sensing that something was afoot.

With the Liberty motor turning almost two thousand revolutions a minute as I dived, I sent the D.H. hurtling earthward like a meteor. The exhaust pipes were spewing banners of blue-red flame; the struts were dancing in their sockets; and the screaming wires were wide blurs as my two-hundred-mile-an-hour speed almost tore the ship to pieces.

I had the nose of the ship pointed directly for the mouth of the well, barely visible to me a few feet below the fire. I could scarcely see through the smoke but, with my hand on the bomb release, I forced myself to wait until the last minute. Subconsciously I noticed that the roof of Cone's house was already afire.

"Maybe we won't have to bomb that," I thought.

Then the D.H's nose pointed straight for the well and I released my bombs with four fast jerks on the bomb release. As the ship was relieved of the weight, it seemed to bound upward. I used all the terrific speed of the dive to twist it upward and to the left. A second later the first of four mighty explosions were audible to me above the roar of the overwrought Liberty. The terrific concussion threw the ship through the air while I fought it helplessly. An instant later the world darkened. I got my ship under control two hundred feet high and right over our landing field. I looked back. The fire was out. I yelled, shouted, sang and did everything but a back flip.

If an instant's vacuum is created over a burning well, the flow of the gas ceases momentarily and the fire goes out like a snuffed candle. My bombs, brought along for moral effect on the townsmen of Burley, had gone through to the mark.

The tip of my left wing was charring.

"We ought to be ace-high in Burley now!" I thought.

Down around the well men were cheering and waving. Undoubtedly my sending the plane through that terrific heat and rolling smoke had seemed far more dangerous than it was.

It was then, as I banked the ship at the southern edge of the field, that I saw three men erupt from the trees rimming the back yard and rush down the hillside. In the lead was the gaunt Mr. Cone, and no mistake about it.

"Trying to get away while everybody's around the well," I thought with exultant satisfaction.

Cone's house was burning more merrily all the time, and he'd been forced out into the open like a rat from a burning ship. You've no idea what exquisite satisfaction filled my soul as I roared head on down toward him and his two companions.

The world was suddenly a beautiful place full of joy and satisfaction and flowing with silk and money. I regretted deeply that it seemed wise to take Mr. Cone alive as I poured a spray of machine gun bullets into the ground fifty feet ahead of the fleeing trio.

They stopped for a second as Tex and Daly came roaring down. Then it seemed that Cone and the two men decided that they might as well be killed now as any time. As one man they started running for the civilian ship. This time my burst of bullets ahead of them didn't stop them. In a second, I had made up my mind.

Barely one hundred feet high, I banked the De Haviland and dived for the plane. My bullets raked it fore and aft. At all costs, I must avoid killing Cone and his friends. The press would have an interesting story to tell, I imagined, and one which the Government should not be deprived of by their untimely demise. In a way I had to admire their guts as I was forced to hold my fire and saw them pile into the ship and start the motor. My bullets had evidently not taken effect in any vital points.

I was only fifty feet high then, and perhaps one hundred yards back of the field as whoever was flying Cone's plane swung it around and started to take off uphill. Tex and Daly were milling around as if uncertain what to do. They were evidently trying to figure out some way of stopping them without killing them.

I was the nearest and I did it. As the ship taxied up the hill for the take-off I swooped down like an eagle at a chicken, my head over the side of the cockpit. I caught up with them in less than four seconds.

Now a portion of the crowd was streaming around the house to see what was up. I waited until my ship was darting along twenty feet behind the taxiing fugitives. At the last minute I jammed the stick ahead. The D.H. dipped down. There was a jar as my undercarriage crashed through the wing-tip of the outlaw plane. I guess I must have come a little too low, because the next second my propeller smashed into a thousand pieces as the roar of the untrammelled motor rose to a scream.

Something hit me a terrific blow on the side of the head. It was a piece of my propeller. I was conscious just long enough to cut the ignition. Then I passed out as the earth seemed to travel upward to meet my ship.

LIEUTENANT Slimuel X. Evans, the bovine buckaroo of the Border, had been unequal to the occasion and as usual checked out just when a little hand-to-hand fighting was imminent.

I checked in again just in time to observe a verbal battle between Tex and Daly and the irate mob. The bone of contention was whether Mr. Cone, Mr. Moreno and a couple of their boy friends shouldn't be lynched right then and there. Burley had set out to do a little rough-and-tumble hanging and was sorely disappointed when Daly and Tex gently but firmly objected.

Some one had abstracted me from the wreck and laid me on the ground, so I scrambled to my feet and carried the bump on my head over into the center of things and the two-for-a-cent hero of the occasion swung the argument our way.

So it was that within five minutes Sheriff Meeker confessed. The murder of Mr. John Sanger, by order of Frank Cone, with the guilty knowledge of Meeker and Moreno and the two actual murderers, was in the book.

That's about every bit of it, I guess. The McMullen boys arrived in force about an hour later and we had our prisoners in the McMullen jail by eight o'clock in the morning.

Then started the publicity. The enterprising Mr. Macy had galloped over to the nearest town right after he left us and got Cone's murder and Daly's past on the wire. The evening papers carried the real story. As the public prints from Frisco to New York seeped into McMullen poor old Daly, though outwardly unchanged, had plenty of reading matter about himself. He went on up to San Antonio with the prisoners, so I didn't see much of him until he blew back to McMullen to say goodby.

Not until he was leaving did I bring up the matter.

"The two actual murderers and maybe the whole bunch of 'em will swing for Sanger's murder," Daly was saying at the depot. "The State of Texas has a way of doing these things up brown. Those two bozos that talked so freely may get away with life."

"And what do you get out of it outside of being a marked man?" I inquired. "Are you kicked out of the Service yet?"

He shook his head.

"They seem to want to keep me," he said quietly.

I raised a loud voice to say—

"Well, why wouldn't they?"

Then Tex said gently:

"I know how tough it has been and will be for you, Duke, and how many two-for-a-cent false alarms won't be welcoming an ex-pro-gambler for tea. How about the killing of that bozo?"

"The Government has taken a plea of self-defence already and there won't be any more to it than more publicity," Daly said quietly.

For a moment we were silent. Apparently the whole thing had had less effect on him than a pea-shooter would on the rock of Gibraltar, but I knew differently.

"Do you know," he said suddenly as he prepared to get aboard the train, "I've been dreading it all these years and I don't know but what I'm glad it finally came. I feel relieved that the worst is over."

"Well, there may be something in that," I told him. "I'm now going to go down and face about six bozos I owe money to, tell that Carson dame that I'm through and inform the Government how much I cheated on my income tax!"

"Not a bad idea." Daly smiled. "So long."

And that was that.

"You know?" Tex said as we started driving back to the field. "He was two jumps ahead of a fit when we started out for Burley. I'll be damned if I don't believe him when he says that he's glad the skeleton popped out of the closet!"

"I suppose," I answered, "that from now on you're going to quit ducking things you dread and meet them eye to eye and tooth to tooth."

"If I did that—" Tex grinned—"I'd make that visit to the dentist that I've been putting off for six months, right now."

"Well," I said, "of course one can go too far in conducting his life according to Daly's idea, but it's a fact that most of the things I've dreaded didn't turn out to be half as bad as I expected."

"How do you know?" asked Tex. "Have you ever been married?"

By the Author of "Porto Bello Gold"

ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

Galleons in the West

SMOKE eddied thickly under the low roofbeams of the Harry Morgan tavern, and the sour smell of spilt wine-lees and rum joined with it to quench the pungent aromas drifting through the open windows from the waterfront of Port Royal town: aromas of the sea, splashing against the sandy beach; aromas of the Jamaican backcountry, stretching inland to the distant Blue Mountains. And the hoarse growl of voices lifting above the heavy tables drowned out both sea-sounds and land-sounds.

A yell of savage laughter sent the smoke swirling, except in one remote corner where four men leaned over a table which was dignified by chairs instead of stools or up-ended kegs. Here, through the dim light, you caught a glimmer of jeweled baldriquins, and the hands brandishing long clay pipes shone with rings which might have been worn by prince or cardinal. And if you looked closer, you saw that one of the four held himself somewhat aloof from the others, and that his dress was characterized by a rich simplicity in contrast to the ostentation of his mates.

This man was rolling himself a cigarro of prime Verina leaves, and his nose wrinkled distastefully at times when the fumes of the others' crude Virginia drifted his way. A man prodigiously tall and lean, with a thin-lipped mouth and wide, gray eyes as flinty-hard as the Toledo blade which swung at his hip. Long Dickon, he was

called—Long Dickon the Pi̇caroon—and his name was known in every island of the Caribbees and every town on the Spanish Main. So was his ship, the *Sorry Jest;* so were her culverins.

Next him sat a small, inconspicuous fellow, saved from mediocrity by the cruel selfishness of his lantern-jawed face. However he was born, the Spanish Main knew him as Captain Saul Peters, once of the city of Boston in the New England plantations, now of the snow *Good Intent,* and a merciless ravager of all that came his way.

Across the table sat a lank Norman, melancholy of visage, almost wistful of gaze, whose droning voice was suggestive of the pulpit—and rightly. He was L'Abbé Rouge; and of all the craft which hailed from Tortuga his *Blanchette* was dreaded most. A disturbing fellow to encounter on the high seas, but a lamb compared to the man at his elbow, whose gnarled and wrinkled features, like those of a preternaturally aged child, glared with a light of evil beyond all description. Little Gobbo was his *nom de guerre,* but whence it came or whence came he none could say.

From the waist upward Little Gobbo was of normal size, his arms, indeed, as long as a tall man's; below the waist he was a dwarf, with short, misshapen legs, a horror to behold. Behind his chair stood a giant negro, seven feet tall, jungle scars notched in his cheek and yellow eyes tiger hungry. Bini's part in life was to bear his master on his shoulders—and there was no spectacle more fearsome to peaceable men than that of Bini, swarming a ship's rail, a cutlass in each hand, and Little Gobbo, legs wrapped around his neck, darting a boarding-pike as deft as a serpent's fangs. The dwarf was master of the *San Pietro,* which once had been a respectable galleon of Genoa.

"And I say once more," Peters was asserting, "with all respect to Dickon, there's no reason to suppose they'll alter their usual course. Tush, there's no originality in the Dons. They set a plan, and they stick to it. Every year the Flota follows the same route. The armadas at Porto Bello bide until the mule-trains have fetched the Peru treasure across the Isthmus from Panama. They stow it with the tributes from Cartagena and La Guaira and the other towns on the Main. And then they put forth for the Havana, to bide there until the armadas arrive from Vera Cruz with the treasure of Mexico and whatever was fetched in the Acapulco galleon from Manilla. The which having been accomplished, the united Flota makes sail through the Straits of Florida for Spain. There's our post—in the Straits of Florida! Why none has attempted it hitherto—"

Little Gobbo's voice boomed from the depths of his chest:

"An ill place to lurk, my Peters. Narrow seas a-swarm with *garda costas.* They'd have word of you in a week. No, no! If there be aught in Dickon's tale, 'twill be simpler to keep watch in the Windward Passage."

L'Abbé Rouge produced a map and spread it on the table between them.

"But how if Dickon be but half right?" he pointed out. "How if, indeed, they ha' changed the Flota's course, but instead of the Windward they use the Mona Passage? M'sieurs, we can not cover both, so how if we make compromise? Bide at Tortuga, the four of us, and send small, swift craft to ply inward o' both vents? If the armadas come through the Windward Passage, we shall have tidings amply in time to strike. And if they come by the Mona we can make shift to intercept them off the outer mouth, saving alone we meet contrary winds."

"And what if they come by the Havana, after all?" whined Peters. "There'll be months of idleness, with drunken crews fighting one another, and like enough ready to vote us out of command."

"You speak for yourself, there," exclaimed Long Dickon, rousing himself. "I ha' no fear for my men."

"Ah, *your* men," mocked Peters. "We all know o' your men, Dickon! 'Tis a king's ship y'have."

"A parlous set o' rogues, but faithful," Long Dickon answered calmly.

"And so I'll speak for mine," echoed Little Gobbo. "And if we fail, after all, ha' we not failed before? There are other ventures to turn to. Cock's faith, I ha' confidence in Dickon." He chuckled. "'Tis not like him to share any chance. Depend on it, my Peters, he has reason for it."

"A reason, I grant ye," retorted Peters. "But how if it be one to our disadvantage?" He turned toward Long Dickon. "Mind ye," he put in hastily, "I seek no quarrel with ye. But since Morgan's time the Brethren of the Coast ha' not sailed in the squadrons. 'Tis been every man's hand for himself. And that's fair, too. Who'll say the contrary? The pickings grow leaner. Aye, there'll come a day when such as we will not be welcome in Port Royal—as once we were not afore when Morgan had need to prove himself within the law, and took thought of his governorship to hang stout fellows who'd put him where he was."

Long Dickon interrupted, level-voiced.

"If that's your argument, I am a-weary o' talk."

He rose slowly, thrusting his sword-hilt behind him.

"As Little Gobbo said, I ha' reason for seeking allies. The boar is overbig for me to run down by my lone. Further, I am not greedy. There's twenty-four million pieces of eight in the Lima treasure and, besides, the gold of Veragua, the tribute and whatever the merchants ship. Fifty million pesos out o' Porto Bello, say—and nigh as much in the Vera Cruz armadas.

"Nigh a hundred million pesos, twenty million pounds! We couldn't take it all, to be sure. But the pickings! And forget not I ha' reason for my plan. This Indian I met in Nombre de Dios Bay has cause to be grateful to me, and he was certain of the talk among the merchants in Porto Bello—the fleets were to rendezvous off the Belize this year, and put across the Caribbean together to the Windward Passage, as the nearest vent to the Atlantic. And certain it is from other inquiries I made along the Main, the armadas for Porto Bello rode three months at Cartagena, instead of two, and 'twas reputed they might bide beyond the usual month at Porto Bello—which, I make no doubt, is to afford time for the Vera Cruz fleet to come down to meet them.

"'Tis a sane plan, if ye ask me. The Dons are put to it, knowing that we of the Brethren are desperate for loot, with no wars at sea; and furthermore they're frighted by the harm I wrought the Barralavanta fleet off Catoche this year past."

"It has the right ring for me," boomed Little Gobbo.

And the Norman added, more than half-convinced—

"Yet, perhaps, if we divide—"

"Divide," snarled Peters. "Are ye out o' your wits? 'Tis to divide us Dickon seeks."

Long Dickon stared down contemptuously at the New Englander.

"Divide or no," he said, "I am going aboard. When y' ha' come to a decision, one or all, send word to me."

THEY would have stayed him, but he strode out as if he had not heard them, nodding to a sailor here and there. One, a thickset, burly man, rose to follow.

"In half a glass will do, Whitticombe," he said casually. "I ha' errands to attend."

Then he was in the doorway, breathing deep of the languorous air, clean and fresh after the dank atmosphere behind him. He paused a moment to enjoy it; and a voice addressed him from the darkness, a fresh, treble voice of youth, colored by a trace of accent—Latin, he guessed, yet scarcely Spanish—

"Are ye him the picaroons call Long

Dickon, sir?"

"Aye," he replied; and added good-humoredly because he was used to such appeals as he anticipated, "But my company is full, lad, and in any case I ship none save English, Scots or Irishers."

The treble voice answered him, undismayed—

"I ha' more than a sword to offer ye, sir."

"And what's that?" he countered quizzically.

"Somewhat y' have a wish for," was the confident return.

A quality in the voice, suddenly noticed, made him reach out and grasp a velvet-clad shoulder. He dragged the speaker under the flickering rays of the battle-lanthorn which shone faintly on the painted head of Sir Henry Morgan, swinging above the tavern door. A feathered hatbrim shadowed his captive's brow, but he discerned an oval face, olive-tinted, and great blue eyes which met his, unafraid, yet curiously intent.

"And what's *your* wish, madonna?" he challenged.

A mobile mouth, wide and sweetly shaped, answered straitly—

"To serve ye—for my own ends."

Long Dickon whistled to himself.

"So, so," he muttered. "H'm! Come a ways with me."

And he led her around a corner to where a bright light burned in front of a house with drawn jalousies which failed to contain the tinkle of mandolin and spinet. He surveyed her more attentively. A proper youth in seeming. Loose coat of purple velvet, handsomely beruffled; green breeches; glossy boots; a rapier at her side.

"A very play-actress," he protested.

"So I ha' been," she rejoined. "Sir, I am told y'are a gentleman."

"Now, who may ha' so accused me?" he demanded.

"'Tis common report on the Main."

"Ah, y'have been on the Main?"

"I am fresh hither from Cartagena, in the *Aert Jansen*, a Dutchman, of Curaçao."

He whistled again, in a way he had, mighty tunelessly.

"How are ye named?" he asked abruptly.

"Arlissa."

"Arlissa what, madonna?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I ha' heard my father was one Mocenigo, but I never saw him."

"Y'are Italian?"

"My father was Venetian; my mother Cretan, a Greek of the Islands."

He whistled more tunelessly than ever.

"I'll wager y'have traveled," he advanced as abruptly as before.

"Everywhere," she answered carelessly. "I ha' danced in Venice, in Paris, in your London, in Madrid."

"And so, now, we come to what we seek," quoth Long Dickon. "In Madrid, ye say! And from Madrid y'have traveled to Cartagena on the Main. There's little to be gained by a lass of your qualities in Cartagena—if she can dance in Madrid."

A doleful look stole over her features; and very exquisite features they were, Dickon decided.

"Ah, sir," she sighed, "that was my mistake."

"Which I am to redress?" he inquired skeptically.

"No, no," she cried, clasping her hands. "'Tis revenge I seek, Master Dickon."

"Plain Dickon will do," he said. "'Tis all I demand of my men. And how are we to compass your revenge?"

She hesitated, as if deliberating.

"Sir," she said, "my lover was the Señor Don Francisco de Salazar y Beneventes. He—he is captain of the soldiers on *El Rey Don Carlos.*"

"Ho-ho," chuckled Long Dickon. "And unless I am wrong, *El Rey Don Carlos* is *capitana* of the Porto Bello armadas, of the whole Flota of this year, in fact."

"'Tis so—Dickon." The doleful look on her face changed in a flash to an

expression of hatred, of uncontrolled rage, eyebrows twisting, beautiful eyes kindled, mouth distorted. "Oh, I hate him, that Francisco! He—he—" her voice became a wail—"he threw me aside for an Indian halfcaste. Holy Mother! He would have given me out-of-hand to a friend who was overseer of slaves in the mines. But I am a citizen of Venice, and I would not suffer it. I went to the governor, and he said I might go away. And since it was dangerous for a woman to travel unattended, I bought these clothes—I can use a rapier very well, Dickon—and I took passage aboard the Dutchman."

LONG DICKON considered her, not unkindly.

"Ye spoke first of serving me," he suggested, "and afterward of revenge. But if ye can use rapier, why, one o' your temper should be able—"

"'Tis not his death I desire." Why did her mouth twitch all awry? "I'd ruin him," she pushed on hurriedly. "You must know if all goes well, and the Flota arrives home safe, he has been promised promotion to *maestro de campo,* colonel of a regiment, aye, sir, of the *terza* of Compostella, which is a vast honor."

"God save us from all Spaniards," said Dickon largely. "But I care not, madonna, whether he—"

"Oh, but ye do," she interrupted. "Would ye not stop the Flota wi' your picaroons?"

Long Dickon's eyes narrowed.

"Show me how," he bade her.

"Thus," she said. "They fear ye on the Main. They fear all the picaroons, but they fear ye most, Dickon. There was much talk, and none took heed to me. So I heard all. How they would change the Flota's course this year. How the Porto Bello armadas—ye hurt my arm, sir!" He loosened his clutch, bowing slightly, and she resumed, "Ye know how they sail—the usual course. But this year the two fleets will meet off the Belize. Already they ha' sent *garda costas* and a galleon or two to make safe that coast. And when the two ha' met they will sail for home, not by the Straits o' Florida, but by the Windward Passage."

For a space Long Dickon was silent. There was no emotion in his face.

"What's your price, madonna?" he asked finally.

"Nothing," she retorted. "Nothing ye can pay, sir, only—only—"

"Will ye ha' the man killed, this Don Francisco?"

She crossed herself hastily and quavered:

"I'll not ha' blood on my soul! No, Dickon, I ask nothing but that ye take all from the Spanish pigs, and—and ruin him."

Long Dickon rapped with his rapier-hilt on the door beside them. If she was curious, she kept silence, even when a mulatto maid opened to them, recognizing the picaroon with a toothy smile.

"Tell your mistress I'd ha' speech with her," directed Long Dickon. "No, we'll not come up. 'Twill take but a minute."

There was a patter of feet within, a rustle of skirts, and a slender bit of a dark creature would have flung herself into his arms. Solita, this, whom men called the Spanish Jade, the best—and truest—light-o'-love in Port Royal; queen alike over the picaroons and the king's officers who made sporadic attempts to curb them. The Spanish Jade!

"Look ye, sweet chuck," said Long Dickon. "Ye know the gossip o' the Main. Ha' ye heard of a sightly wench, Arlissa Mocenigo, who came out from Spain?"

"With the captain of the soldiers in the Flota?" chimed Solita. "But yes, yes, yes, my Dickon. And I have heard, too, she was reputed for a dancer in Venice and Madrid. She has had many admirers, that one."

Long Dickon tipped up the hatbrim of his companion.

"Would this be she?"

Solita studied the girl with the impersonal scrutiny one pretty woman accords another, but there was a certain asperity in her manner of answering.

"As like as not. She has some looks even so dressed."

"Question her—in Italian," bade the picaroon.

The two women exchanged a rapid give-and-take, sharp as musketry in a thicket.

"She knows what she should know," admitted Solita. "But let me feel her legs." And the Spanish Jade stooped to run her fingers along Arlissa's calves above her boot-tops. "Yes, yes, my Dickon, she has the muscles of a dancer. Will you leave her with me?"

Long Dickon laughed shortly:

"Thank ye, no, little one. I ha' use for her." And at the angry cloud which settled on Solita's flower face, "Not what ye reckon, though. Here!" He fumbled in a pocket and produced a bracelet of shimmering emeralds. "Keep a corner o' your heart warm for me. I'm off wi' the morning flood."

Solita snatched at the stones and raised herself on tiptoe to peck a kiss at his chin.

"Ah, beeg Dickon," she exclaimed, "you do not forget Solita, eh? Ah, to sail with you! Some day I shall, and while you are gone I shall tell my rosary for you every day."

She dropped a curtsy to Arlissa, politely spiteful.

"Madonna," she murmured, "the Blessed Saints alone know how honored you are."

Arlissa ignored this parting shaft, but when the door had closed—

"Of what more use can I be?" she asked. "I ha' told ye all I know."

"That's to be seen. Ha' ye no wish to see your vengeance made good?"

"No," she answered simply.

"Well, say I'm inclined to your company, then," he offered, "albeit 'tis against the articles of the Brotherhood to ship women. Are ye feared o' me?"

Her head lifted proudly.

"I fear no man."

"The right spirit," he approved. And seriously, "If my luck holds, madonna, ye shall ha' the reward befitting. Come!"

Whatever her thoughts, her face remained inscrutable, and she walked back with him compliantly to the Harry Morgan. At the door he poked his head into the smoky taproom.

"Whitticombe!"

The stocky, blond man responded, half a dozen sailors at his heels—brown, whiskery, earringed knaves, alert and menacing.

"My bosun," Long Dickon explained, and she nodded a placid acknowledgment.

"Hark ye, Whitticombe," he continued, "y'are to set this young *gentleman* aboard the *Jest*. Put him in the spare cabin in the poop. Treat him courteously, but guard him safe. 'Tis a violation of our articles, I know, and ye shall ha' my reasons in good time. Am I understood?"

"Aye, aye, Dickon," came the hoarse growl. "And what o' that bodkin she —hrrrumph!—*he* carries?"

Long Dickon shook his head in gentle reproof.

"Sure, 'tis sufficient if we break one of our articles, lad! 'Tis the rule that all aboard may bear arms."

ENTERING the tavern, Long Dickon noted out of the corner of his eye that she received without quailing the questioning glances of the picaroons as they closed around her. A stout lass, and a hardy!

The three at the corner table looked up, faces flushed and irate, as he approached.

"What? Not of a mind yet?" he mocked them. "But ye will be in half a glass—or the *Jest* sails alone. If I had any doubt o' what's toward, my mind's at ease, now."

"Ye ha' fresh news?" boomed Little Gobbo.

"Direct from Cartagena. But before ye hear it ye'll contract wi' me on a small matter."

"The lion's share?" jeered Peters. "I say no. Because ye carry the heaviest battery, and a lousy tawny sang ye a silly song—"

"What I ask has naught to do wi' the treasure," snapped Long Dickon. "That we'll share alike, after the custom of the Brethren."

"Fine words don't make a sound preacher," whined the New Englander. "Y'are ever for yourself, man. I know ye!"

Long Dickon made to turn away, but L'Abbé Rouge plucked at the skirt of his coat.

"No, no, sit, *mon ami,*" exclaimed the Norman. "Why should ye not ha' some small favor of us? Bethink ye, Peters, 'tis to him we owe this chance. Me, I am with him, if none other be!"

"And I," proclaimed Little Gobbo.

Peters sank back in his chair with a gesture of dissent.

"Blame me not if aught goes wrong," he grumbled sourly. "What is this rare news to set us ablaze?"

"Judge for yourselves," replied Long Dickon, taking his seat. "As I left ye but now . . ."

THE *Sorry Jest* lifted lazily to the swell, a mere showing of canvas on her yards to give her steerage way. To larboard a dull purple haze clouded the horizon, the only land visible in all that empty waste of waters—empty, that is, except for a faint gleam of topsails to starboard where the *San Pietro* patrolled her beat. And beyond her, at equal distances, the *Good Intent* and the *Blanchette* bridged the gap from land to land. Otherwise, indeed, the Passage was empty, for at the first sight of these sea-wolves the local coasters and fishermen had fled.

Long Dickon stood by the pooprail, whistling imperturbably the same tuneless tune over and over again. Behind him Arlissa lounged against the framework of the stern lanthorn, hands in pockets, boyishly graceful, a harassed pucker ridging her smooth forehead. He swung around on her, without warning.

"Y'are impatient, madonna?"

"And are not you?"

He smiled.

"No man who follows the sea can choose his time."

"But 'tis all of a month y'have plied these seas," she persisted sulkily.

"And after what ye told me I'd ply 'em a month longer," he returned cheerfully.

The pucker in her forehead deepened, and she looked past him into the waist, where the great culverins squatted in a double rank, and scores of men, naked to the belt, sat on the deck, gambling or smoking. What might have been a shudder racked her slight frame.

"And—and if it comes not—the Flota?" she hazarded.

His smile broadened.

"What, madonna? Will ye doubt—"

A thin hail from the maintopsail-yard—

"Sail ho!"

Men scrambled to their feet, and Dickon raised his prospect glass again—not that there was necessarily anything important to expect. The same hail had been heard many times before, and some fortunate merchantman, after due inspection, had been wished on his way, with curses, for the sole reason that Dickon did not wish to draw attention to his presence thereabouts. Arlissa scarce heeded the stir. But she spun on her heel like a flash when a babble of cries broke from every masthead:

"Galleons i' the west!"

"Ho, Dickon, galleons!"

"Five sail of 'em—six—seven—eight—"

Long Dickon's tone was emotionless as he leaned over the rail and hailed the milling crowd in the waist:

"Stations, there! Stand by to make sail! Master Gunner—fire a piece to starboard!"

Smoke belched from a culverin's throat, and almost instantly was answered from the *San Pietro,* which must have sighted the quarry in that moment. And miles and miles away to windward, Dickon knew, the *Good Intent* would duplicate the warning, and call in L'Abbé Rouge in the *Blanchette.* The trick, now, was to bunch his hounds as rapidly as possible. They'd come unfaltering, but it must be mid-afternoon before the Norman was up, three glasses, at the least, before he could count on Peters.

He calculated rapidly. Best bide where he was awhile. The Spaniards, if they heard the guns, would reck nothing of a ship or two in their front. Who'd ever thought to stop the Plate Fleet in its pride? Not Morgan, even. And a pulse of exultation sent the blood pumping through his veins . . . He was conscious of a clutch on his elbow, a voice clamoring:

"Dickon! Dickon! Where are we? Oh, Dickon, is it, in truth? But where are we? Where—"

He turned, exultation forgotten, a light of compassion in his eyes.

"Mona Passage," he said; and then at the stricken look in her face, "Poor lass, did ye think so easily to deceive me? I had word the same report was put about in Porto Bello, aye, and believed it. But when ye would ha' cozened me I saw the truth—or the half-truth, for I made certain the course was changed from the Havana and the rendezvous set for the Belize. The log-wood-cutters assured me as much, and there was an Indian—" He saw her hand steal upward to her doublet, and caught her wrist in time. The dagger tinkled on the deck. "For me?" he asked gently. She shook her head, and he reached down and restored it to her.

"Ha' done wi' that," he continued. "Y'are no ways to blame. Bethink ye, madonna, 'twas the fault of those who sent ye. They should ha' bided content wi' the gossip they first put about."

"But 'twas I," she whimpered. "I told Francisco I'd go."

"More fool he," returned Long Dickon. "He should ha' known better than to let ye. Y'are no lass to sell your lover for a broken troth. Once I was certain ye were who ye claimed to be I knew what was toward. So did every man in my crew after he'd set eyes on ye. A wench in a thousand, they said—ha' they not given ye all respect?"

She nodded.

"Well, then, rest easy. Ye ha' played a main and lost. As, belike, shall we."

"But how if ye win?" she questioned fearfully.

He patted her shoulder.

"In fighting, there are broken heads," he said, "as in love there are broken hearts. But trust me. And leave cold steel be."

Her eyes met his with the steady valor which had first betrayed her to him.

"I thank ye, Dickon," she said. "Y'are all they say o' ye on the Main."

"Pish," he returned lightly. "I am a picaroon, a buccaneer of the Brethren of the Coast—and in Porto Bello or Cartagena they'd hang me for a pirate on the highest gibbet they could build."

THE wind was moderate, out of the northeast, and favorable to the picaroons; the Spaniards must beat up against it. So Dickon put on sail gradually, partly in order not to seem anxious to close, partly in order to allow his consorts time to come up. It was past noon before he had all his canvas drawing, and by then the *San Pietro,* the crankiest sailer of the four, was well in sight, bowling along on one leg of a triangle, of which the course of the *Sorry Jest* represented a second, while the Flota constituted the apex.

The *Good Intent,* an uncommonly smart ship, was become a snowy cloud running a course diagonal to those of her two mates, all three converging on the treasure fleet. There was, as yet,

no sign of the *Blanchette.*

The Spaniards paid no attention to the strange sails. After all, the Mona Passage was a main highway from the Caribbean into the Atlantic—and what they feared was not an attack in broad daylight, but a lone rover or two, who might hang upon their track until they were scattered by rough weather and seize the opportunity to pick off some straggler. Who had ever heard of three vessels attacking eleven, for from the foretop Long Dickon had counted that many, including three pataches and four galleons no larger than his own ship.

Arlissa regarded him almost with awe when he returned to the poop.

"Santa Maria," she murmured, "how dare ye venture such odds? The *Don Carlos* has two tier of ordnance, and the others—"

"Your Spaniards call popguns cannon," he told her, smiling. "Bide till ye see my bulldogs bite. And we'll sail a knot and a half to their one."

The afternoon waned slowly. Below, in the waist, all was in readiness for action—deck sanded; guns cast loose; shot in the racks; small-arms served out; grapnels hooked to the bulwarks fore and aft. But the crew showed no more excitement than their captain; it was an old story to them. Their chief diversion was in betting on what would happen to one another:

"An onza to a guinea ye lose an arrm, Noll."

"That be more'n Oi'll pay for t' guts o' ye, Mike—half-crown be aplenty."

"Five yeller boys to ten Ah bain't scratched."

"Not ye, Mac! Shift the odds, and I'll think on it."

And now the Spaniards were plain to view, rolling along clumsily like cows at a trot, bucking their bluff bows into the swell, tossing the spray as high as their unwieldy forecastles. The van ship was a great galleon, her figurehead a glare of red-and-gold, her yellow sides pinked with red gunports, triced up to show the brassy jaws of her batteries, her bellying foresail bedizened with the quartered arms of Castile and Aragon.

And the herd of craft that wallowed after her were less gaudy only by comparison with her magnificence, the smallest bristling with cannon.

Miniature figures became visible, leaning over the towering bulwarks, and as the *Jest* closed the Flota the sunlight twinkled on a morion on the galleon's aftercastle. Arlissa's hand flew to her heart.

"Ah, *Dios!* Francisco!"

"Best go below, madonna," said Long Dickon. " 'Twill not be they, alone, who take shot."

But she protested vehemently:

"No, no! Will *he* go below?" And with a moan, "But why don't they know?"

Long Dickon pointed to the lion flag of England flaunting overhead and, glancing astern, she saw that Little Gobbo was impudently displaying the Maltese Cross of the Knights of St. John. Her eyes flamed.

"Have you no—no chivalry?" she stormed.

"Chivalry?" he repeated patiently. "We are picaroons, and 'tis the custom of our Brotherhood that each vessel shall sail under the flag to which it owes allegiance."

"But England is not at war with Spain!"

"I grant ye, but I ha' never seen the day when Englishmen would forbear to pick a Spaniard's chest. What, madonna? Shall they hold half the world in fee and not show 'emselves able thereto?"

She crossed herself, helpless for words. But he observed with approval that her eyes were tearless, the angry flush still bright in her cheeks. Almost he envied this Francisco.

So far the Spaniards had regarded the picaroons as no more than a welcome diversion in a monotonous voyage, but as the *Jest* held to her course, with apparent purpose to traverse the Flota's

formation, the van ship fired a gun, and a gray-bearded man on the aftercastle motioned peremptorily to windward. Long Dickon responded with a low bow, ironically courteous, and bade the helm put up as if in compliance—and then, as the Spanish admiral doffed cap in acknowledgment, he went about in a trice and stood fair across the galleon's bows.

"Matches, Master Gunner," he shouted, and the decks quivered under the thunderous detonations and the recoil of the culverins against the breechropes.

He was conscious of Arlissa at his elbow, her hungry eyes striving to pierce the eddying smoke, but he put her resolutely from his mind and ordered the helmsmen to wear ship. And nimble as a cat, the *Jest* spun on her heel and stood downwind past the Spaniard's larboard beam, the gunners in the waist working feverishly to reload. All hacked and splintered now was the gold-and-red figurehead of *El Rey Don Carlos;* her forecastle was rent, her bowsprit dragging in the water. And again the culverins roared, and the yellow splinters flew from her lofty sides, and a brass demi-cannon of the lower tier toppled backward as an eighteen-pounder shot smashed into it.

The smoke clouds towered and spread, obscuring the galleon's plight, but in the interval before the *San Pietro* resumed her punishment a howl of anguished resentment blended with the clang of trumpets sounding a belated call to arms.

The *Jest* stood on between two following galleons, pouring her broadsides into them simultaneously, while the *Good Intent* attacked the Spanish rear, where two of the pataches, utterly panic-stricken, fell foul of each other, and finally drifted apart, a mess of fallen spars and wreckage. The *San Pietro,* however, not so adroit as her consorts, became involved in a pummeling match with the one Spanish captain who kept his head and laid the picaroon aboard, and was not extricated from this situation until the *Jest* had retraced her course and taken a raking position under the galleon's stern-windows.

"Weather 'em, Gobbo, weather 'em," Long Dickon admonished as their victim flapped out of range. " 'Tis oversoon to board."

"Content, most excellent signor," boomed the dwarf, high on Bini's shoulders above the ruck. "But suffer me yet to slay that knave—he said I was no Knight of St. John!"

In the meantime *El Rey Don Carlos* had made good her injuries, and came lumbering back into the fight, carrying with her the two galleons Long Dickon had roughed, taking under her wing in passage the unfortunate object of Little Gobbo's spite. But the picaroons refused to meet the Spaniards on their own terms. Leaving the *capitana* and her mighty sisters to vomit useless salvos from their chase-guns, they bore off before the wind to join the *Good Intent* in a series of slashing thrusts at the milling herd of small fry—bewildered merchantmen, these, who had trusted implicitly to the protection of the Flota.

The two pataches which had been in collision hauled their wind without more ado, and plodded off like wounded ducks for the nearest haven they could find in Hispaniola. The five remaining, pounded to desperation by the heavier batteries of the picaroons, rallied together and made a gallant attempt to close the action, despite the flailing culverins. A dangerous moment for Long Dickon. It meant one of two things: either they'd pin him between two fires or else he must draw aside and permit them to gain the protection of the four King's ships, maneuvering for the same object.

Arlissa was all but dancing on the poop beside him.

"Y'are beat, Dickon; y'are beat," she cried.

But a deep-throated roar sent the

smoke-clouds swirling to leeward, and the lilies of France showed in the rift, then vanished as L'Abbé Rouge tacked to bring his starboard battery to bear. *Crash!* went the mizzen of a merchantman, and a yell applauded from the *Jest's* bloody waist.

"Lack 'em, mounseers!"

And the *Sorry Jest,* the *San Pietro* and the *Good Intent* stood down to join the *Blanchette,* reckless of her shot which whistled over their decks.

It was too much. The four merchantmen whose spars were unwounded cut their sheets and ran for it, thinking only of saving their own cargoes. The dismasted Spaniard struck at the first blast of the *Good Intent's* guns—and presently made off as best he could when he discovered the picaroons had no further use for him, with the four royal galleons standing downwind after them, furiously determined to force the action.

FOR the first time the Spaniards had the weather-gage, but the picaroons had the heels of them, and kept away at extreme range, content to maintain a dropping fire of snap shots aimed at spars and rigging. Arlissa turned scornful at this spectacle.

"By the mass," she exclaimed, "y'have had a bellyfull, and little scathe to ye that I can see!"

"Bide a bit," answered Dickon. "Our game is long bowls." And he hallooed to the waist, "Pass by the *capitana,* Master Gunner. Lop me a stick from his next astern. 'Tis the fellow we mauled with Little Gobbo; belike he's touchy."

One by one the *San Pietro,* the *Good Intent* and the *Blanchette* perceived their leader's object and concentrated their fire upon the unfortunate galleon. She winced perceptibly, and fell out of line, then swung back again, her consorts rallying desperately to cover her. But a lucky shot from the *Good Intent* ripped her rudder from the pintle, and as she broached sharply her foremast snapped off a dozen feet above the deck, toppling overside in a litter which dragged her down by the head.

In the midst of the cheering Arlissa heard Dickon, beside her, start to whistle that odd tuneless tune, which was his one evidence of emotion. She put her hand on his arm.

"Ah, prithee, Dickon, let Francisco go," she said timidly. "Sure, one of 'em is enough!"

"Aye, plenty," he assented absently. "But, d'ye see, he'll not take it so? Look, madonna!"

The third and fourth galleons, as if in response to a signal, had gone about on the larboard tack, and were running for it, full and free before the wind. She shook her head to show she didn't understand.

"He—or his admiral—will try to fight us off," Dickon explained. "And if they can't, why, at least, they'll have saved half the treasure. Those merchantmen weren't worth the picking—cacao and coffee, sugar and tobacco. Aye, one would ha' been enough. With all this loot in hand I'll be shipping a new crew, worse luck! Ah, here he comes!"

She covered her eyes as *El Rey Don Carlos* hauled her wind and stood down toward the four picaroons, guns flaming, trumpets, drums and shawns playing sturdily.

"Oh, Mother of God," she groaned, "and but for me—"

The picaroons broke for their prey like a pack of well schooled hounds. *The Good Intent,* handiest of the four, went about on the starboard tack, took the wind on her quarter and headed after the fleeing galleons—more to make sure of their flight than because she had any hope of coming up with them. Little Gobbo, seconded by the *Blanchette,* beat to windward to finish the crippled Spaniard, who received them most valiantly with every gun he could use. The *Sorry Jest,* close-hauled on the starboard tack, made no attempt to evade the attack of the *capitana.*

Here was an end to maneuvering;

Long Dickon intended to pound it out, muzzle to muzzle; and, watching the Spaniard's unflinching approach, he knew that he had to meet men whose fiery pride had been stung to the quick, who were prepared to welcome death as an alternative to the disgrace of their failure.

When one of his helmsmen was cut in two he only whistled flatly to himself, pushed the bewildered Arlissa out of his way and helped the dead man's comrade meet the tug of the clumsy tiller and bring the ship back on her course.

But however anxious to close, the Spaniard came abeam with boarding-nettings triced. It was the *Jest's* people who flung grappling-irons to bind the vessels together and leaped the gap between to climb the lofty bulwarks of the *Don Carlos,* seeking a footing on gunports or the red-hot snouts of cannon, anything to help them win to her decks, regardless of the small-arm fire which beat upon them or the wicked punishment of the pattereros spewing barrelfuls of musketballs into their ranks.

Long Dickon, himself, was first, jumping from his own mizzen rigging to the enemy's forecastle. Clutching at a stay to balance himself, he turned to wave on his men—and there was Arlissa at the bulwarks he had left, straining through the smoke toward the aftercastle of the *Don Carlos,* where a silvered morion shone faintly in the murk. He leaped to the galleon's deck, and his picaroons poured after him—brown, hairy, half-naked devils, who picked up their dead and flung them as missiles to make gaps in the ranks of the Spanish marines, who tried to resist them in ordered ranks of pike and shot.

They had cleared half the maindeck when a yell of triumph from the Spaniard's forecastle made them pause. Long Dickon looked over his shouder—and there, again, was Arlissa, curls tossing in the wind, hewing with a boarding-ax at the grappling-cable. Its strands flew apart in that instant, and the *Jest* swung clear on the pivot of the forward grappling which a group of her crew were fighting viciously to protect from the garrison of the galleon's aftercastle. Long Dickon laughed.

"Good lass," he called, although she could not hear him in that din. And to his men, "Now, knaves, 'tis neck or nothing for ye!"

"All with ye, Dickon!" they shouted back, and surged forward so staunchly that the last of the Spaniards tumbled down from the aftercastle to brace the defence.

Long Dickon, shirtsleeves rolled above his elbows, presently found himself crossing swords with Silver Morion.

"'Tis Don Francisco de Salazar?" he called, his blade clinking on the Spaniard's corselet.

"Yes, Señor Picaro, and shall be your executioner!"

"No, no, I think not," rejoined Dickon, twisting the rapier from his enemy's hand. Leaping in before the Spaniard could reach dagger, he overset him with a swift shoulder lunge remembered from wrestling days in Cornwall.

"Your captain has yielded," he shouted in Spanish. "Good quarters to all! Down arms!"

WEARY, disheartened, ready to be persuaded, the survivors of the galleon's crew cast down their weapons without a murmur, although Don Francisco gasped from the deck:

"I said it not! A foul trick!"

Long Dickson smiled and, seeing him heavy in his armor, offered a hand to help him rise.

"Call it what ye will, señor," said the picaroon. "I ha' saved ye for your lady. What? Would ye ha' died at her feet—and she heartbroken?"

"Better to ha' died than to live dishonored," Don Francisco answered sullenly.

A jar alongside, and Peters vaulted

the rail, leading a pack of lantern-jawed Yankees from the *Good Intent.*

"'Tis finished, eh?" he snarled. "Y'are always hasty, Dickon. Well, here's one of 'em unblooded, and me with a clean blade."

His cutlass slashed at Don Francisco's throat; but Long Dickon's rapier leaped out and the cutlass whirled overside.

"By your leave," quoth the picaroon. "This gentleman is my prize, he and his ship, according to our agreement. No, no words, Peters, or I'll lose temper with ye."

The gray eyes hardened.

"Be off, man! You tread my patience. Put your fellows to work wi' mine to shift treasure."

Peters hesitated, fingers curling for a pistol-butt—and went head-over-heels as a feminine whirlwind struck him, then flung herself with almost equal force upon Don Francisco, babbling a mixture of threats and endearments in two languages.

Don Francisco would have put her aside.

"All is gone wrong, sweet, and I dishonored," he mumbled wearily.

"Ah, Mother of Sorrows," she cried, "and I to blame! But ye know not this man—he is a devil!"

Don Francisco wagged his head soberly.

"No, then, a heretic, Arlissa, and 'tis well known such receive undue sustenance from hell."

Long Dickon bowed with that courtliness which so became his lean height.

"If it please ye, *amigos,*" he observed, "there need be naught gone wrong nor shall his most esteemed excellency be adjudged dishonored." He raised a hand to restrain Don Francisco's objection. "Bethink ye, señor, y'have neither struck nor yielded, and how say ye if, after some miserable booty—the consideration of which befits not so gallant a cavalier—has been removed, ye retake the ship and her companion?"

A flicker of interest dawned in Don Francisco's eyes.

"D'you mean that, in truth, señor?" he exclaimed, while Arlissa regarded the picaroon with an expression half quizzical, half resentful.

"That do I," protested Long Dickon. "Ho, Whitticombe, see Don Francisco to his cabin. Madonna, your servant kisses your hands and feet."

But her expression turned scornful as she drew closer to Don Francisco.

"Sir," she said, "I hate ye. I hate ye for that y'are. Oh, I hate ye!"

THERE was some small bicker of firing in the air as the picaroons scrambled down the side of *El Rey Don Carlos* to regain their own deck. As the ships drifted clear Long Dickon hailed the *Good Intent,* vividly outlined in the sunset glow.

"Saul Peters, if ye lack him once I'll riddle ye!"

The galleon's maindeck battery boomed raggedly, shot splashing right and left. The crippled consort, moving slowly under jury-rig, sent a similar aimless broadside after the *San Pietro* and the *Blanchette,* which held disdainfully on their course.

Long Dickon grinned.

"Master Gunner," he called, "give him all ye have—only spare shot. There's naught like powder to salve a Don's pride. A pox on the fellow! He'll have his *terza* and an Order from the King before he's done. And the lass."

A chuckle from the boatswain, conning the topmen beside him; and Dickon asked in a merry voice—

"'Twasn't so well between 'em, eh, Whitticombe?"

"Not save my Spanish be faulty, Dickon."

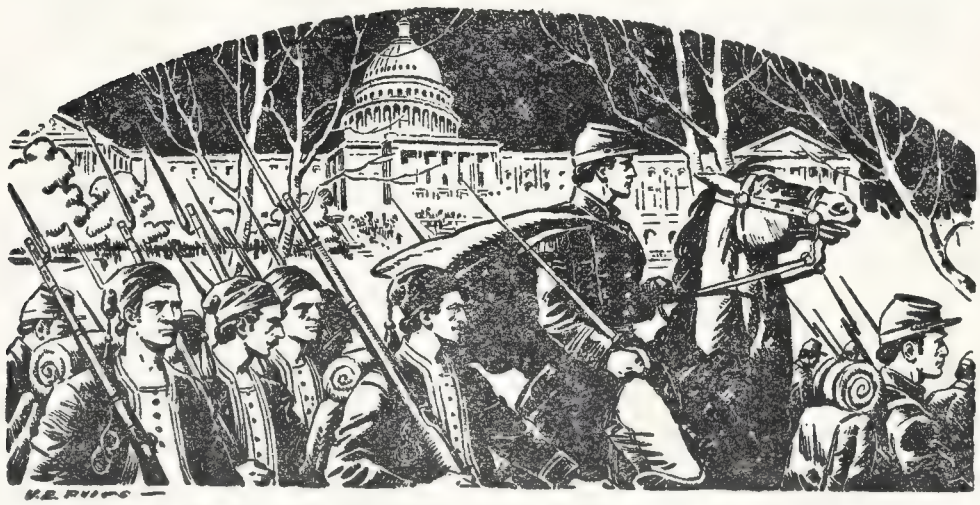
Long Dickon stared thoughtfully across the widening gap of water at a small, straight figure standing defiantly upon the galleon's aftercastle.

"Ah, she's not one to make a feint of honor . . . But the Brethren had the right of it. A man can't master a ship and a woman together."

Continuing

When the Bravest Trembled

By GORDON YOUNG



Author of "Days of '49"

The Story Thus Far:

RAND LANISTER, in the Spring of 1861, left Texas to join the Northern Army. His mother, a Northern woman who had never really been happy in the slave-holding South, had before her death made him promise that in case of war he would never fight against the men of her family.

Old Bill Raze, a plain frontiersman, accompanied Rand because he was too devoted to the lad to part from him.

Rand's defection of the South estranged his father and his cousins; but his uncle, a general in the Confederate forces, was a sympathetic man. He understood the woman whose son Rand was.

General Lanister gave Rand a pass through the Confederate lines from New Orleans and wished him a pleasant journey to New York.

It did not occur to Rand that Northerners were different from Southerners till he found that in Manhattan his Texas accent was conspicuous. He had no desire to join any of the hoodlum regiments that were mustering in New York, so he and Mr. Raze traveled on to Washington, intending to enlist there.

During the early days of the Civil War Washington was a politicians' paradise. Among the most notorious scoundrels who used their positions of power for personal gain were Major Clarky and Captain Terris of the military police. They collected bounties for spies. They promptly arrested Rand as a spy when he admitted that he came from south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Then they discovered in his pocket General Lanister's pass through the Confederate lines which Rand had foolishly forgotten to destroy.

Rand was thrown into the old Capitol Prison. Bill Raze managed to escape the police by telling artful lies.

In prison Rand was taunted by Captain Terris, who boasted of his knowledge of the whole Lanister family.

However, Captain Terris did allow Rand to receive a visitor who came with authority from General Heckle. The visitor was a mysterious woman. After questioning Rand, she left him a note chiding him for carrying a Confederate pass

into Washington. She did not reveal her name. Rand put the note into his mouth, chewed it well and swallowed it.

TWO days later Rand was again taken from the jail, this time by one of the sergeants, and shown into a room where Mr. Raze, without his rifle, peered hard and quickly into the boy's face, wanting to see how he was, how much he had suffered.

Mr. Raze was not a demonstrative person. They shook hands.

"You look some peaked, son," the old man commented; then he stepped back out of the way.

Two officers were in the room. One leaned forward on his elbows across a table, twirled a pencil between his palms and frowned severely at Rand. Then he glanced with disapproval at his superior—a tall man, very lanky, very nervous, and straight as a ramrod in a colonel's uniform.

"This here is Colonel Sherman, son," said Mr. Raze. "He wants f'r to talk to you."

Sherman was then about forty. His face was already deeply wrinkled and he wore a short, bristly red beard. Tall, wiry, restless, he was seldom entirely quiet at any moment except during battle; but there was nothing fussy about his nervousness. His piercing eyes were of such a dark blue as often to be called black. They were strangely quick, and their glance was as direct as a fist blow.

His recklessness of speech was appalling. He said that he would rather be accused of lying than of speaking ambiguously or evasively. His decisions in battles and elsewhere were incredibly rapid and never haphazard. At West Point he ranked sixth in his class in scholarship, but in deportment one hundred and twenty-fourth. There was nothing of the goody-goody about William Tecumseh Sherman. He once put a reproachful delegation of Presbyterian preachers to rout by proving to them that they knew nothing about the temptation to blasphemy or the extenuating circumstances for blasphemers.

Sherman, as one of eleven orphaned children, had been adopted by a wealthy man.

"Take Cump, Mr. Ewing," a sister of Tecumseh had said. "He is the smartest!"

The nine-year-old Tecumseh at once fell in love with a foster-sister and never wavered in his devotion. When they were married, some ten years before the Civil War, President Taylor and all the members of the Cabinet attended the wedding.

At the beginning of the war Sherman might have had almost any military rank he wanted. His brother was a powerful Senator in the Republican party—his foster-father a man of enormous influence; but Sherman would not play politics then or afterward.

When he became a great general and occupied enemy cities, his name rang through the length and breadth of the Confederacy as that of a barbarian. Yet the door of his headquarters was never closed to children who came straggling in, peering tremulously; soon they played about the legs of generals in council. A staff officer records that the presence of children caused the net-like furrows of Sherman's fierce face to vanish.

He moved great armies and knew every detail of every division with a smaller staff about him than his own generals thought necessary for themselves. He did it by staying in the saddle, seeing things for himself rather than depending on reports and messengers.

He was—and probably still is—the most hated man in the South. He fought the most unchivalrous and destructive campaign of the war. At the war's beginning he alone of Northern men seemed to know the real strength of the South, and in the end how to break the back of the Confederacy. Yet, like Lincoln and Grant, Sherman did not show the least personal hate of Southerners, but praised their valor and objected to

punishing the defeated when the war was over. Prominent Southerners of Louisiana, whose estates had been confiscated by those Union patriots who wanted some profit out of their patriotism, appealed to Sherman for help in getting their property restored, and he gave his help.

Many Southerners called him a traitor because, though Ohio-born, he had resigned as superintendent of the fashionable Louisiana Military Academy to go North. Beauregard had been one of his references when he applied for the position; two of Beauregard's sons had been Sherman's pupils. On the other hand, Northern patriots yelped at him, saying in all seriousness that he was crazy—a libel that Sherman's friends thought was inspired by the jealous McClellan—and almost brought him to a court-martial because he insisted that the South could fight and would fight desperately. Northern patriots so completely mistook this warning that they charged Sherman with traitorously trying to discourage the Union.

After the war, politicians tried to boost Sherman up as their party figurehead. His rare judgment of men did not fail him. He would have nothing to do with them, distrusting all politicians except his brother as he distrusted the devil—or a newspaper correspondent.

General Wolseley, the supreme English military critic of his day, said—

"Lee was a great general, and next to him was Sherman."

The greatest enemy in the field that Sherman had—one whom Grant rated even above Lee—was General Joseph E. Johnston. Long after the war, when Sherman died and was buried with the ceremony and pomp becoming a conqueror, there appeared unobtrusively among the mourners at the graveside a little old gray haired man with head bowed low over his cane. It was General Joseph E. Johnston, C.S.A. He came to pay final tribute to the general who had defeated him on a dozen battlefields and at last, with no bitterness or sound of triumph, had accepted his surrender. It was Johnston's surrender, not Lee's, that ended the Civil War.

There were giants in those days, in the North and in the South.

NOW Colonel Sherman stood smoking a cigar, pulling on it hard, and eyeing Rand. The captain at the table, twirling his pencil, said, with unfavorable urgency—

"Colonel, you just make him tell what he's doing up here with that pass in his pocket!"

Colonel Sherman flung out his long arm, scattering the ashes from his half smoked cigar, and spoke irritably:

"People up here think accent's a sort of shibboleth. But, damn it, don't you know Jeff Davis himself talks like a Yankee? No need to ask questions. I know General Lanister. He's a gentleman. One of the Trustees of the Military Academy in Louisiana. Had a letter from him myself, wishing me well, when I resigned. Might as well accuse me of being a spy. If you fellows in this office are really looking for spies, don't arrest boys with Southern accents who carry an old pass for a keepsake. Do we send Yankees into Richmond to nose around? Confederates are smart too—as you'll find out before this war is over."

Sherman threw his cigar at a cuspidor and jerked another from his pocket, stabbed it into his mouth, bit and spit.

"Come over here, boy. Bill Raze here has told me about your troubles. I quite understand why you didn't want to enlist with the type of recruits we're getting. Be good soldiers after they're licked two or three times. I'm on General Scott's staff now, with no command of my own. Promised one. Wait till I get it, and I'll be glad to have you with me. And Bill, too. We can use you, Bill. It'll be like putting an old bull in pony harness to subject you to military discipline—though there's damn little discipline in the Army yet!"

Sherman abruptly turned on the frowning captain.

"Let me have the release of Randolph Lanister."

"But, Colonel Sherman, you haven't questioned — don't know — Major Clarky—"

"Of course I know! Good Lord, look at him! He's no more a spy than your big toe. Parole him to me if you're afraid he'll carry off the Capitol."

"Most irregular, and Major Clarky will—"

"Snort and make loud noises." Sherman nodded in agreement, but held out his hand demandingly. "Hurry up."

"But General Heckle—"

"I have the authority of General Scott to use my own judgment in this matter. And I'm using it. Come on; come on."

"An'," said Mr. Raze, "they took three hundred dollars in gold offen Rand!"

"It will be returned." Sherman spoke with finality.

"This may cause complications!" the captain murmured with malicious hope.

"If so, the result will be that a lot of the military police go on the firing line and learn what Rebels really look like." Sherman waggled his extended hand impatiently.

The captain put down his pencil, picked up a pen, examined the nib, dipped it in ink and scratched, trying the point. He glanced up as if about to protest again, saw a restless frown, sighed and wrote.

MR. RAZE sat on a creaky bed, held one knee with both hands, and said:

"Yestidy when I camped like allus before General Scott's house, tryin' to horn in so as to tell 'im about you, a nigger come up and says to me, 'Lady round the corner in a kerrige wants to see you.'

"Ladies an' me get along best fur apart, so I says nothin'. He says, 'She says if you is inter-rested in doin' a favor f'r Mr. Lanister to come an' see 'er.'"

Mr. Raze shifted his quid, spat at a corner, grunted:

"I went with the nigger. She was purty as—as—"

"I know, Bill. Her name is Laura Lorraine. Even the name is pretty."

"You know? How kin you know?"

"She is an actress. Was in New Orleans. Knew my uncle's family. That major and another high-tailed officer brought her up to look at me to see who I was. It's mighty queer the way they talked and she acted."

"So that's the way of it, hm? Well, son, she looked at me sort o' steady. Then she leaned for'ard an' said low an' quick and half laughin', '*You* are no Yankee!'

"I said, 'Miss, I don't never dispute with a lady!'

"She says, 'Did you meet the Lanister boy on the ship from New Orleans or have you known him a long long time?'

"I says, 'Miss, I met him about ten minutes after he was born, an' we been together 'most near ever since.'

"That made her laugh a little an' she put a hand on my arm. Then she ask' me if you are really a Yankee an' did you come up here f'r to enlist?

"I looked at her close an' studied some, 'cause I allus try to tell ladies what I think they want f'r to hear. I must 'a' guessed purt' near right 'cause her fingers took holt o' my arm an' she said quick an' low, 'Go see Colonel Sherman. Tell him about Rand Lanister. Colonel Sherman is from the South and a friend of the Lanister family!'

"I ask', 'An' do I say you sent me, miss?'

"She says quick, 'Mercy, no! Never! Don't tell any one. But Colonel Sherman can, and will, help the boy. Then tell him to come to me.'

"An' she give me this here piece of paper."

Mr. Raze held it out. Rand took the paper. No name or message—just an address. Rand stared at the address,

moodily recalling her face, tawnily rich in color, lighted with a quick play of thought; and underneath the beauty lay a shadow of tragedy. He brooded, perplexed with wonder at the mystery of her and her beautiful face, luringly strange, impalpably sad.

Mr. Raze watched the boy, then gazed at the ceiling, pretending not to have looked at him at all, and went on with his tale.

"A feller pointed out Colonel Sherman to me. I stopped him this arternoon. 'Colonel,' I says, 'just supposin' when you come North to fight f'r the Union you was put in jail f'r a spy 'cause you don't talk through your nose?'

"He give me a look. When he looks at you, he hits you. Maybe you noticed? Then he throwed away his cigar an' give me another look.

" 'Who's been botherin' you?' he asks, quick.

" 'It's a young friend o' mine, Colonel. He's been damn fool enough to leave a fine home an' folks that love 'im—' "

"You said that?" Rand protested.

"I never lie," Mr. Raze answered severely, "onless the truth don't seem suit'ble. The colonel, he took my arm an' says, 'Come over here an' set down. Let's talk!'

"Me an' the colonel set on a hitchin' rack, smokin' his cigars, an' I told him. He cussed a little. He's a good cusser, the Colonel. He knowed two o' the Lanister boys well. They was in the mil'tary school. An' he 'membered Miss Judith. He called the general a mighty fine man. He says, 'Wait till I go speak to General Scott, then we'll go see the boy.' So we come."

Rand listened hazily, holding the slip with the address between thumb and finger of each hand as he leaned forward in his chair. The mystery of why she pretended before Terris and Clarky to be an avowed enemy of the Lanister family, yet secretly offered friendliness and furtively found a way to help him, wrapped Rand in a daze of wonder. Some vague sense of warning seemed trying to tell him to crumple this paper and throw it away; forget the woman. She had helped him after Old Bill, who was unerringly shrewd, had made her believe that neither he nor Rand had really come North to enlist. Or maybe that was why? Curiosity and an excited feeling that he forcibly explained as just gratitude urged him to do as she requested.

"What do you think of her, Bill?"

" 'F she's friends with that Clarky feller she ain't so purty as I thought. Not by a long shot."

CHAPTER VI

AN ERRAND OF GRATITUDE

RAND got out of the hack before a two-story brick house, covered with vines that had been cut away at the upstairs windows. It was early in the evening. Lights burned dimly through undrawn curtains at two of the downstairs windows. Elsewhere the house was entirely dark.

He paid the driver and lingered at the curb, doubtful that this dark house on a lonely street could be the address of Miss Lorraine. Then he went through the low iron gate that guarded the small lawn, and the gate swung to with a rasping clang. He mounted the steps and rattled the knocker.

A tall, middle aged woman, dark of skin but somehow pale, with dark hair parted evenly in the middle and bunched in smooth rolls below her ears came to the door. She opened it with an air of caution and looked very hard at Rand as he stood in the light of a gas jet above her head in the entrance hall.

"Good ev'nin'. Does Miss Lorraine live heah, ma'am?"

"Miss Lorraine?"

"Yes, ma'am. I don't know the city." He drew the paper with the address from his pocket, offering it. "But the cabman brought me heah."

The woman looked at him as if letting the echoes of his Southern voice linger in her ears. She bent forward, scrutinized the slip of paper, then stepped back and to one side.

"Come in, sir." Her voice was low, soft, hurried.

As he entered, she glanced through the doorway, looking up and down the street before she closed the door. The woman reached up, turning the gas jet higher, and regarded him steadily as she asked—

"What is your name, sir?"

"Randolph Lanister."

Her dark, inquisitive eyes took on a new interest. Her face seemed too grave for smiles, but there was an attentive friendliness in the way she reached for his hat and gestured toward a chair.

"Please sit down."

She continued to look at Rand, then turned and, plucking at the front of her long skirt, went up the stairs. Her feet were noiseless on the thick carpet. At the turn of the stairs she paused, again looked at him for a long moment.

Time passed. Rand sat on a straight-backed chair, waiting like one forgotten. The big house was very quiet and lonely. Nearby an open doorway led darkly into an unlighted room; and there was a faint odor—not unpleasant—as of a sachet, reminding him of his uncle's daughters, especially of Judith. A tall clock across from him was ticking, but as if timidly. He sat listening in an attitude of patient waiting, and gradually became aware of the fugitive sounds that have no connection with the presence of people—the little creaks and stirs heard only in the profound silence of lonely places.

He glanced toward the stairs. The woman was returning. She lifted a beckoning hand.

"Come with me, Mr. Lanister."

He followed her up the stairs to a door that stood open. The woman moved aside, inviting him to enter, and came in behind him, closing the door.

Miss Lorraine stood across the room with her back toward him. She was drawing the curtains. She did not appear aware of him, but continued carefully to draw the folds beyond the sides of the windows.

Rand felt awkward and uncomfortable at being unnoticed. He started to put a hand in his pocket, but drew it away with resolute jerk and tried to recall what he had planned to say. Something unfamiliarly elaborate. "I greatly appreciate—" The studiously mulled phrases rehearsed in the hack were gone. Again a dangling hand crept pocketward. Had she inveigled Sherman into getting him out of jail because she believed he was loyally Southern, or in spite of believing that? Rand wondered uneasily. "If she's friends with that Clarky fellow she is not so pretty as I thought!" Old Bill was seldom wrong.

Rand's throat felt dry. He restrained a cough. The dark complexioned woman stood near the door behind him like a suspicious guard.

It was a large room, with figured wall paper and a bluish carpet. Brass objects, hazily noticed, shimmered in the gaslight. The odor of sachet was stronger here, clean and pleasant. A fireplace with the ashes of burnt papers was on one side of the room. Nearby was a brassbound wood box, with firelighter, bellows and tongs in a rack.

Miss Lorraine wore a tight-waisted riding habit of dark blue, with a skirt that fell to the floor in lines that made her seem tall, especially as she stood erect. Her lithe body would bend and straighten as she stooped with care to make sure the drawn curtains excluded the light of this room from the street. He noticed the easy dexterity with which a light push of her foot moved the long skirt, got it out of the way. It made him think of Mrs. Lanister, of his cousins. Perhaps French-Canadian ladies were much on horseback too.

Hat, crop and gloves lay on a sofa, carelessly tossed there. The pale but

somehow sallow woman moved forward with quick noiselessness, gathered them up and laid them aside on a low table.

MISS LAURA'S first look at him was searching, almost as if she did not recognize him, or at least were doubtful about wanting to see him. However, she smiled as she came forward with softly rustling skirts and put out her hand. She had the nicest friendliness that he had ever found in a strange woman; but there was something else too. Even as she held his hand her glance went beyond him in a quick look toward the somber, pale woman. Rand tried not to feel that there was something wrong somewhere.

"You are prompt, Rand. How are you?"

Her fingers were cold—long, delicate, strong fingers, but chilled as if just dipped in ice water. She patted the back of his warm hand as it held her cold fingers and smiled queerly, seeming to scrutinize every inch of his face.

"I thought maybe you wanted me to come right off. Anyhow, I wanted to come an' say I'm mighty obliged!"

He liked the way she smiled.

"I am glad you did, Rand."

"I don't know what they'd have done to me but fo' you!"

"I know Washington, Rand." Miss Laura used his name quite as if she had a right to do so, but spoke like a cautious person who wishes to appear frank. "It is like a chess game here. One move compels another. But sometimes other persons make moves you don't expect. You were named for your uncle?"

"I sho'ly was, miss!" Pride was in his voice.

"And Judith has told me of you." She smiled; her tone hinted teasingly.

His face instantly burned. He felt that he must look like a boiled beet and grinned awkwardly, not speaking.

"Rand, what on earth are you doing in Washington?"

He was clumsily embarrassed, but looked straight at her. He felt tongue-tied, choked; yet he managed to blurt:

"I can't understand about you, miss. You made them officers think you hated my family, then got me out of the bad fix I was in. I'm mighty sorry if Bill made you think what he oughtn't about me. But I did come North fo' to enlist!"

"Ah, you did?" Her tone was guardedly ambiguous, her look enigmatic. He saw that she glanced past him toward the motionless pale woman by the door, then she kept on studying his face as if not sure of what to think. "What does your uncle think of that—and Judith?" She stressed Judith's name as if she knew Judith's secrets.

"My uncle said I was doing right if I thought I was doing right. And I do."

"But Judith?"

Rand shook his head.

"And what do you think of the North now, after meeting Major Clarky and the elegant Captain Terris?"

"Why do you make 'em think you're their friends when you ain't?" he asked.

"Oh, Rand, Rand!" She spoke impulsively, with no gaiety. "This is a topsy-turvy, muddled, mad, cruel old world! I have to be friends with those I do not like and—" this seemed pointed directly at him—"befriend whom I ought to hate, terribly!"

She went on talking, but rather as if wanting to gain time to clear her thoughts, put her conflicting emotions in order.

"I was riding this afternoon with a stupid general." Miss Laura shrugged one shoulder. "He really is very stupid. He approved of having you shot as a spy. And I must be stupid, too, because I was afraid to try to make him think you weren't a spy! When I came home I fell to dreaming and forgot, or rather—" with faint bitterness—"remembered! I didn't realize how late it was growing. I ought to go out this evening. But I am glad for an excuse not to go. Come, sit down here by me. Tell me about yourself, Rand."

He felt that she was somehow moving behind invisible curtains, concealing and revealing herself at will. One moment she had an almost proprietary air of intimacy toward him; the next, she was elusively remote, as if she did not quite like him. Little cautious feelings tried to whisper that the intimacy was not entire friendliness.

"Even if it is a Spring evening, this room is chilly. A little fire, Mrs. Margate."

"Yes'm," said the tall, sallow woman.

Manner and tone were that of a willing servant; but something more than a servant, too. With a kind of expert daintiness she at once began to lay kindling.

They sat on the sofa. Miss Laura brushed at the folds of her dress as she asked with guarded casualness—

"Your father is a Northern sympathizer, too, Rand?"

"My holy gosh, no!" Soberly, "He swore if I come North he'd sho'ly kill me like any other Yank." Pause. "He'd do it, too."

He leaned forward, peering at the flame that now twinkled among the kindling under the puff of the bellows in Mrs. Margate's long, yellowish fingers.

Miss Laura's dark eyes watched him. He, gazing at the fire, did not see. Then she looked toward the lifted face of Mrs. Margate, who knelt on a thin cushion with bellows in hand. Their looks met in a moment's blankness, questioningly. Mrs. Margate shook her head and turned to the fire.

Miss Laura's mouth tightened. With a steady look under a frown she watched Rand's profile, set with muscular firmness. She caught her breath. It was like a sigh, and there was a kind of struggle in the tenseness with which she remained calm, as if she did not dare move.

"But I seem to remember having heard that General Lanister's brother was against slavery?"

Rand nodded and went on looking at the fire.

"You heard right. But he's fo' the South. Much as anybody. He says the South'll be free if it takes every drop of red blood b'low the Mason and Dixon Line."

"But you are Northern?" Her veiled tone also asked why.

"My mother—I reckon. She was Northern. She'd talked to me a whole lot—purt' neah eveh since I can remember—befo' she died last Winter. She didn't have any notion that dad would fight fo' the South. He wouldn't eveh argue with her. He'd take it out on somebody else. She made me promise solemn I'd come North, and I come."

THE fire was beginning to throw out warmth. Rand stared at it broodingly. Miss Laura sat quietly, also brooding. Her hand absently groped for a cashmere shawl behind her. Mrs. Margate arose, spread it over the girl's shoulders and let her hand rest lightly on one shoulder as if in secret encouragement. Miss Laura did not look up. She bunched the loose fringe away from her wrists and observed Rand.

Mrs. Margate laid a piece of split oak on the andirons, arose and pushed the cushion to one side with her foot. She left the room with one backward glance of concern.

Miss Laura shuddered and drew the shawl closer. Half formed shadows of anger flitted over her face; and furtive, baffled, ironical twitchings plucked at her lips as if, somehow, here was a bitter jest. Time and again she seemed about to speak, but checked herself. At last she asked simply—

"Do you happen to know why Captain Terris acts as he does toward you?"

"I heard that Valentine slapped his face."

"Do you know why?"

"No'm."

"Because of me. Your cousin said that any lady was disgraced by having her name cross the lips of a man like Captain Terris."

"Then why does Terris think you'd hate us Lanisters fo' that?"

Laura, after much thought, shook her head as if warning herself not to reply and said quietly, without emphasis:

"This morning Major Clarky, aided by Captain Terris, succeeded in getting the order to have you shot. General Heckle signed it."

He sat up with the start of one suddenly awakened.

"No?"

Miss Laura nodded with a downward glance at her fingernails, and raised a hand from her lap the better to inspect the pink nails.

Rand studied a moment, then grinned.

"I'd like to heah 'em cuss when they know I'm loose!"

She made no reply, but straightened her fingers, turned the palm upward and seemed idly to study her fortune in the tangle of palm-lines.

"But how could they shoot me when I wasn't even tried, or nothing!"

Miss Laura said tonelessly, as if thinking of something else:

"The statement of the Geold person was quite enough, and convincing. You confessed to him—or so he said."

"They believed him!"

"Whatever the *agent provocateur* says in Washington is sufficient."

"He lied!" Then, with troubled wonderment, "But why? Why'd he lie like that? We were strangers."

"The Geold person has a stomach and a back, my friend." She called him friend very coolly, with a detached air and lack of friendliness in her voice. "Unless he catches spies he must eat plain fare and go threadbare—or return to picking pockets. That was his trade before he became a patriot."

"Ain't nobody honest in this damn country?"

"Besides," Miss Laura added, "he has said, and Major Clarky has agreed, and Captain Terris, who is a lawyer, has affirmed, that if you did come North to join the Yankees you are a traitor to your own country—and ought to be shot anyhow. Some other people may think so too."

"Do you?"

Her hand fluttered up in a careless gesture of putting the idea aside.

"It would seem so, wouldn't it—since you are out of jail, and here at my invitation?"

RAND frowned at her. Something was wrong somehow. The frown did not keep him from seeing that she was beautiful; and it was the kind of beauty that seemed to envelop a man. He wished that he had not come; or, more accurately perhaps, he wished that he wished he had not come. It was pleasant to be here, even if disturbing. He shrugged his shoulders, leaned forward with elbows on knees, again peering at the fire and unaccountably seeming to see the face of Judith there.

Laura watched him. They sat close together, but were actually far apart. Her scrutiny was like a wavering struggle of impulses. She was conscious of her strength and beauty, of her woman's cunning and power, and seemed deliberating on how to misuse it.

"As a Northern soldier, you would shoot General Lanister?"

She meant it as a question. Low, tremulous scorn made a statement, and anger looked as vividly out of her eyes as if the last of the veils were pulled aside.

"You talk crazy. No mo' than I would my father!"

"Just what would you do in a battle, if the general was right before you?" She seemed making an honest inquiry, not merely tormenting him.

"I'd take a pop at the man behind 'im, of course."

"But if he charged right at you?" Her insistence was searching. She seemed determined to find out what she ought to think of this boy.

"He wouldn't, but dad would! I'd turn tail an' run. I ain't going to shoot none o' my family!"

Miss Laura critically weighed tone and words as she continued to watch Rand's tanned, muscular face.

"But there is one man who may soon become a member of your uncle's family that you would be glad to shoot, isn't there?"

He looked at her, puzzled, and shook his head.

"Not as I know of."

"Willis Willamotte."

"Oh."

"Why do you say, 'Oh'?"

"Because when he was intahduced, he shied from me like a proper trained hoss from an Injun. I couldn't 'magine why."

"You couldn't imagine why?" Miss Laura did not believe him.

"No'm."

"You are trying to make me think you don't know of the feud between the Willamottes and your father?"

"Feud? I neveh heard of any feud. Nor much of the Willamottes, 'cept their girls are powerful purty."

"But you know, of course, that the Willamotte boy loves Judith," she murmured.

It may have been the firelight, or it may have been really a flush, on his face. She could not tell. Rand said nothing.

"It would be too bad, wouldn't it, if a girl like Judith threw herself away on that popinjay?"

He vaguely felt that she was tormenting him, but could not imagine why. He looked into the firelight, not answering.

"The Willamottes are idlers, drunkards, gamblers, wastrels!"

No reply.

"You would shoot him readily enough, wouldn't you? In battle, of course?"

"Not 'specially. No, I wouldn't. I reckon I can bang away at strangers in a war and not much care. I don't know. I neveh shot at much of anybody but some Injuns and Mexicans now and then. It sho don't hurt my feelin's to see one of them fall off a hoss. But I'll tell you something," he said firmly, with a steady, calm look; "I most especially wouldn't try to shoot 'im if him an' Judith is in love—'r anybody else she cares about. And if my uncle likes him well enough to have him on his staff, I reckon he is about all right!"

Laura sat rigid and motionless for a moment. Then she resolutely threw the shawl from her shoulders as if no longer chilled, and seemed impulsively to discard more than the shawl. The shadowy lines of hardness that lay muscle-deep on her face went away, and the pretty face softened with a look of anxiety. She leaned forward and put her hand on his arm. The fingers tightened urgently.

"Rand, he and Judith are not in love. I wanted to hear what you would say. So go back, Rand! You will never, never, never be happy among Yankees! Go back to Judith. She loves you. I know. She told me so long, long ago. Go back to her, Rand!"

"Why, you know, I bet you are Southern yo'self!" he said in calm surprise, not reproachfully but as if wondering that he had not thought of it before.

Laura shook her head.

"It seems incredible that even a Texas Lanister would be a traitor!"

"What's wrong," he asked, "with bein' a Texas Lanister?"

"It isn't as truly Southern as Louisiana," she replied with evasive quickness. "And if you remain in Washington you will be arrested again, Rand."

"But Colonel Sherman—"

"Is a colonel! This is war. There are generals willing to see you shot on the Geold person's word! Major Clarky has—"

"Then you don't hate us Lanisters like that black-whiskered devil thinks!"

"Rand, go back! Go at once. Tonight—now! Major Clarky has the order for your execution and tomorrow he will take it to President Lincoln."

"I don't believe you." He looked puzzled and seemed to straighten his thoughts by saying with the slowness of one who cautiously spells a difficult word, "You are Southern yo'self. You got me out o' jail just 'cause Bill made you think I was Southern too. You are trying to scare me into going back."

"I am not!" she said desperately. "Not Southern either."

But Rand nodded.

"You don't need to lie to me. What you've done fo' me I don't fo'get easy. It's no disgrace to be Southern!" His voice had a maddening, soothing assurance as if trying to comfort her.

Laura gave him a perplexed, exasperated look, almost of downright anger, and arose. With a kick of her foot she swept the skirt behind her and walked rapidly away. At the other side of the room she turned, swept the skirt clear of her feet and strode back. He watched her with blank helplessness, and somehow felt that he had done wrong. He wished he could think of something to say to make her understand it was all right, that she could trust him.

THE blurred sounds of a man's loud voice were suddenly audible. Laura, being near a window, paused, listening. She stooped, moved the curtain and raised the window a little. Immediately she pushed the window down, rearranged the curtain and ran on tiptoe, holding up her skirt, across the room.

She opened the door and turned her head, with one hand out behind in silencing gesture toward Rand. The loud voice at the hall door below could be heard more clearly, and seemed to be replying to some one whose tone was low.

"Will see her! Is here, I tell you!" It was a coarse voice, rageful, bullying. " . . . been made a fool of! Out of my way!"

Laura glanced anxiously over her shoulder as Rand got up with a resolute look. She noiselessly pushed the door to and turned in agitated protest.

"That's Major Clarky! I'll talk to him!"

"No, no, Rand!" She met him with fluttering push of hands against his breast. "He must not know you are here. Go into my bedroom, quick—please! He may come up in spite of—"

"I'll throw him downstairs if he does!" Rand caught her wrists with one hand, holding firmly with a pressure that hurt, half dragged her away and reached for the doorknob. "I'll go settle him—"

Laura writhed with pain and with more than pain. She swayed her body, tugging.

"Please!" Her voice was frightened. "Please! He mustn't know! Rand, listen—"

"I'll not hide from any man that needs a lickin'!"

"But you will be arrested again. And shot!"

"Yo' are lying!" he said tolerantly.

"For my sake, please!"

She twisted, freeing a wrist that would have a bracelet bruise for days, and with her free hand caught at his shoulder, stood close to him. Desperation and entreaty were in her tone and eyes.

"Won't you, for me? I know best! And after what I did for you—won't you trust me? Please!"

She felt his muscles relax, yielding. In dogged silence he frowned at the closed door, giving way with backward steps as she pushed. He could not resist the gratitude he felt; but demanded—

"Why are you playin' friends with a man like him?"

"Sh! He may be in the hall there. And if he knows you are here—" Her low tone broke off. She shook her head, warningly. "He mustn't!"

Laura opened a side door, pushed him through hastily, pulled the door to, and he stood alone in darkness.

Rand somehow felt tricked and he

flushed with a vague shame at hiding—at being hid by a woman.

"Damn!" he muttered.

All manner of hasty suspicions danced in his thoughts. Distrust of her became a certainty. He groped for the door handle, found it, opened the door cautiously to a crack's width and peered through, blinking.

Laura was sitting on the sofa before the fire, her head lifted, listening to the approach of steps and the loud voice. Now Mrs. Margate's protest could be heard, too.

A sudden slight scuffle, the bump of a body against the hall door, and the door swung wide. Major Clarky looked through, glared toward Laura and frowningly looked about the room. He did not expect to find her alone. His lumpish face was as red as if the skin were blistered—whisky and anger. His left arm was pressed against his unbuttoned coat as if concealing something.

The sallow Mrs. Margate looked over the major's shoulder.

"I told him you were alone, and unwell, and not at home to any one!"

"Liar!" said Clarky. He took one long step, looking all about. "Where's that damn Lanister?"

Laura had arisen with an air of shocked surprise.

"You, sir, are drunk!"

Clarky laughed, raucously scornful.

"You've made a fool out of old Heckle, an' Terris, but not me—" he struck his breast—"no longer! What'd you do this afternoon, heh? Heh?"

"I was ill—am ill—with a headache." She seemed coolly unafraid. "I needed air and went for a ride alone. I met General Heckle—" she spoke the name with a warning stress—"by chance. Now, go!"

Laura lifted her hand, pointing. It was almost a casual gesture, and untheatrical. Her voice conveyed irrevocable dismissal, but as if his presence were a mere annoyance and not really important. She seemed to have not the least uneasiness or fear of him at all.

Clarky for a moment, in the presence of such poise, was doubtful; then he jeered.

"Headache, bah!" He abruptly faced Mrs. Margate, gestured as if pointing a dog to heel. "Come in here, you!"

Mrs. Margate came with her stately bearing and air of sad bewilderment. The major kicked the door to, making it bang. He braced his shoulders against it and laughed.

"Know what I know, heh? Wanta know what I know, heh? Ha-ha-ha!" His knees wobbled just a little and, clumsily shifting his feet, he caught his balance. "You go back and forth 'tween our lines and Rebel lines all time, just as you please, don't you, heh? Poor little lone brave girl, heh? Heckle thinks you're a nice, loyal Union spy, heh? Knew Beauregard when you were play actin' in New Orleans, heh? Heckle, fat old fool, thinks you're pullin' wool over Beauregard's eyes, heh? It's Heckle's eyes you're pullin' wool over!" Clarky accompanied that statement by a patriotic howl. "You've fooled Heckle with that pretty face of yours—Terris too! Made him think you hate the South an' all Lanisters, heh? But you can't make a fool out of me!"

Again Clarky owlishly peered about the room. Laura and Mrs. Margate for an instant looked at each other with a glimmer of mutual premonition.

Clarky swaggered unsteadily, threw back his shoulders and laughed.

"Your nigger coachman come to me awhile ago. Said he'd tell me somethin' for ten dollars! Ha! I wouldn't pay a nigger ten cents to tell me o' the Second Coming of the Lord! I jerked it out of 'im, by heaven! So it was you, heh, that put that old shaggy goat of a Raze up to making Sherman meddle in my—"

"For ten dollars a Northern nigger would crucify his mother," Laura said scornfully.

"I wouldn't pay ten cents, I told you! Just promised to break his neck. Then I come right straight here. An' I'm

going—"

"Go then! Out of this house, sir! It so happens that I have an engagement to ride with General Heckle in the morning. He will be interested in the conduct of certain officers who drink too much whisky and then force themselves into the homes of ladies who are devoted to the Union!"

"Bah! I'll tell General Heckle tonight what I've found out!" Clarky shouted as if he had to shout to keep from choking. "That damn Lanister spy is here now! Right here in this house, hidin'!"

"Here—who? You, sir, are drunk—or crazy!"

The look in her eyes was like the stroke of a lash. She defied him with unapproachable hauteur.

"Liar! You got 'im out of jail, didn't you? Where the hell else in Washington would he come to hide? Knew his family, heh? Hate 'em, don't you? I don't know how you've made such an ass out of Terris—but not me, ha-ha-ha! I'll bet he is old Lanister's son! He's here now and—"

"On my honor," said Miss Laura, "I swear that he is not!"

"Swear and be damned!"

From under his blouse Clarky jerked Rand's hat with the curiously knotted rawhide band and flung it at her feet. She drew back, but only as if from a missile.

"I come here tonight to find out why the hell you put that old Sherman up to gettin' the release of a damn spy, and I found that hat down there in the hall! On your honor, heh? Ha-ha! On that same honor you go down to Beauregard's camp whenever you want and —and—" Anger and whisky confused his words. "Old Heckle's in love with you—the fool; Terris too. Think you're a spy—they think you're Union spy—but I know now what you are, you—you Rebel Jezebel!"

Laura stared expressionless at the hat and shook her head in denial.

"Shake your head all you like, you can't lie to me any more. He's here and I'll have 'im!" Major Clarky struck his breast as if indicating some reason contained in an inside pocket for being determined to lay hold of Rand. "An' on *my* honor, I'll choke the truth out of you if I don't find that swine."

He glared at the room's corners, searching out hiding places, and his look paused on the bedroom door.

Laura went straight to the door and stood before it.

"You try to enter my bedroom and—"

"That's just the place to look for 'im!"

He started toward her, but stopped. He turned, threw the bolt on the door behind him, then walked out into the room, pausing to give Rand's hat a kick.

Laura, reaching backward, had opened the bedroom door wide behind her. She groped and touched Rand; then, with a petulant flurry of pushes, made him stand aside. He understood that she still wanted him to keep out of sight.

"He's in there! I know he's in there!" Clarky peered toward the unlighted bedroom, coming forward.

Laura slowly moved backward. The distance of half the larger room was between them. The gaslight on the low mantel was cast on her face; behind her was the blackness of the unlighted bedroom into which she was withdrawing unhurriedly. Her right hand was outstretched behind her, not groping, but extended as if she reached purposefully for something.

The gaslight fell like a bright pathway through the door as she moved back and back, shifting the long skirt out of her way with quick pushes of her foot. Her face was pale as marble and as hard.

The sallow Mrs. Margate, near the fireplace, watched with wide, anxious eyes and a look of helplessness.

"On your honor, heh?" Clarky jeered. "On my honor, he's a damned

spy, and I'll have him shot! You too, you Rebel harlot!"

Rand brought himself out of the concealing shadows with a long sidestep.

"Yo' are a liah!" His fists were doubled. "I'm no spy. An' what you call her—I'll break youah damn neck!"

He stood full in the doorway; his shadow blotted the floor behind him, concealing her as if protectively. Clarky teetered back on his heels in surprise, then crouched. Quick glances took in Rand's hands. They were empty fists, far beyond arm's reach.

Clarky at once became confident, felt courageous. His bulging eyes had a mean glint. He laughed and then cursed Rand, working up wrath.

"No right to live, you son!" Oaths. He hastily flung back his unbuttoned coat. With unfamiliar, struggling effort he pulled a revolver loose from its holster. ". . . kill you!"

Mrs. Margate screamed and dodged as if falling, her hands to her ears.

A gun was fired. The jar of its report was shattering. Rand's head bobbed far to one side, uncontrollably. One ear was momentarily deafened. The powder flame had whipped lash-like on his cheek. Major Clarky's lumpish face widened with a stupid look of mere helpless amazement. His hands groped in the air. His revolver dropped to the floor near his feet.

Rand turned in awkward haste, facing about. His fingers were clapped to his deaf ear.

LAURA dropped the gun she had fired. It was too big for her small hand—almost too big for both hands. She shrank back and fell heavily against the bureau. The huddled body of Major Clarky lay face down on the bluish carpet.

The tall Mrs. Margate came forward like one walking in a trance. Her sallow face was paler than ever. Her lips parted. She gasped softly as if breath would not come; then she spoke Laura's name in agonized reproach.

Laura turned, forearm to her eyes and head thrown back. For once her small feet neglected to shift the trailing skirt. She tripped. Rand reached for her and she leaned heavily against him. Her arms hung lifelessly. She was trembling.

"Why'd you shoot him!" Rand's voice was unconsciously reproachful; not really a question so much as just saying something.

But the question aroused her. She stirred and pushed at him.

"Let go. I'll be all right in a minute."

She turned, resting her elbows on the bureau top, knocking off a china dog that held in its mouth a basket for pins. It fell and broke. She pressed her face against her hands. A moment later she threw herself on the bed, huddling face down, her hands to her face.

Rand looked out into the room where Clarky's body lay as if it had fallen in a drunken stupor. A red spot beside the body glistened on the carpet. Overhead the powder smoke sifted in cautious, wavering wisps out of the bedroom doorway, rising and moving toward the gaslight.

Mrs. Margate, in the doorway, gave Rand an anxious and reproachful look.

"She saved your life!"

"I reckon." The acknowledgment sounded halting. Rand was trying to think. "Folks'll say I killed 'im." His tone became stronger. "I'll say I did. You say it too, you heah?"

Mrs. Margate's eyes glistened in approval, but she shook her head and came closer. She looked hard at him as if too cautious to say much. Then she spoke almost shrilly, but obviously not saying what she had intended to say.

"She might have known you would bring bad luck. You Lanisters always do!"

Mrs. Margate was superstitiously convinced; also, her tone had changed. Forgetfully, she spoke with a purely Southern intonation and slur of words.

She put her arms about Miss Laura, whispering endearment, stroking her arms and shoulders, saying—

"Honey chile, don' you fret yourself so!"

Presently Mrs. Margate arose, gave Rand a look that made him feel guilty about something, and lighted the gas in the bedroom. She pushed the door to, shutting off view of the body in the next room.

Rand had an awkward longing to be helpful. His eyes followed Mrs. Margate's movements as if some one of them might suggest something to say or do.

Laura sat up. She brushed at her cheeks and sighed. One hand ran nervously along her skirt, absently smoothing it. She looked at Rand.

"Yes, I might have known you would bring misfortune."

"Me?" The vague feeling of guilt, about something he did not in any way understand, increased. "Why you talk that way, and her too, about us Lanisters?"

Laura nodded. Her reproachful look hurt. He felt guilty of something worse than murder.

"I can't do nothing mo' than say I done it, miss!"

"You will say—that?" Her voice conveyed surprise, not relief.

"Of co'se. Do you think I'd let you get the blame when—"

"But he had the authority to arrest you or any one! You will be hanged!"

Rand cleared his throat, nodding. He had not given that point any thought.

"I reckon." He nodded again. "If I'm caught! I most likely would've killed 'im if I'd had a gun." His eyes dropped as if studying the toes of his boots. He looked up resolutely. "One thing sho', Miss Laura, I'm not going to see you blamed fo' what I ought to have done!"

Laura scrutinized his face; then she looked down at the toes of Rand's neat, tight-fitting boots.

"I do not know what to say," she murmured as if to herself.

Her glance lifted. She seemed doubtful; yet what she saw was a clear cut muscular face, honest, and at the moment soberly tense. Laura nervously folded her hands as if in an effort to keep them from trembling.

"Rand?"

"Yes, miss."

"Major Clarky was a brute."

"I reckon."

"But an important man."

"I reckon."

"If people think you killed him, you will be hanged unless—"

Laura paused, not quite sure whether to say what was in her mind. Mrs. Margate, with a troubled look, listened as intently as Rand. The gas jet sputtered faintly.

"—unless you leave Washington at once, go far away, and are never found!"

Rand said nothing. He gazed at the floor. What she said seemed true enough. Going away did not trouble him—not after the experiences he had had in Washington.

"I can go West." He raised his head. "But that don't settle it fo' you, Miss Laura. Folks 'll say things, won't they, about him being killed in youah house?"

"Yes, Rand, they will. And if you go West, you will be caught. Anywhere in the United States, Rand. There is only one place for you to go. You must go at once into the Confederate States!"

He just looked at her. A host of little suspicions now seemed to speak together at his inner ear.

"*Then* I can say that you were a spy and killed Major Clarky to escape. No other story I can tell will protect me. No other place you can go will protect you." She was calmly logical, not seeming to plead but to explain, yet appealing to his gallantry; furtively also appealing to his Southern sympathies. "Don't you see? Don't you believe me, Rand?"

"But how," he asked, "are you going to explain my being here in youah house

if you are going to try to say I was a spy?"

"Through Captain Terris, Rand. I can make him believe you recognized me. That you came here to—" Laura stumbled over what reason to suggest; not because she was at a loss to think of it, but because she hesitated to mention it to Rand.

"Who is that fellow anyhow? And why are you friends with him?"

"I am not a friend! I hate him! He is the most loathsome person I ever knew. He has always tried to be good to me, but something repulsive about him makes me want to shudder. You see, Rand, I am being honest with you. Captain Terris thinks he knows why I ought to hate your uncle, but that is only because he does not know *me* or the fineness and tender courtesy of General Lanister, of Judith, of all the family! I feel as if the cold foreboding shadow of something evil had fallen on me when Captain Terris is near. He knows my terrible secret, Rand."

Mrs. Margate clucked with timid warning, shaking her head.

"You mean he knows you are a spy?" Rand asked simply. He did not think that being a spy was so terrible, and his tone was tolerant.

"Spy? Rand, you don't think— Why, you know Major Clarky was drunk! No, no! I am talking of something that happened in New Orleans. I will tell Captain Terris that you recognized me and came here to—to—"

Again Laura hesitated. She almost said—

"To make me give you money not to tell my story to important people here in Washington."

But she could not bring herself to say that while she was looking into Rand's clear, honest face.

"To reproach me, Rand, for being a Union sympathizer when I am Southern born."

"I knowed you was Southern." In a quiet way he seemed pleased and approving.

LAURA stood near him, touched him and coaxed, saying:

"You must leave Washington at once, Rand. Mrs. Margate's brother has some clothes that will fit you. Then you must go to Baltimore. I will give you the name of a man to see in Baltimore. After that you will have no trouble."

Rand brooded like one who was weakening. He said nothing, but stood with glance averted, trying to think.

"And when you reach the Confederate lines—General Beauregard is from Louisiana! Go straight to him, Rand. Tell him just who you are and just what happened here—everything!"

Rand pulled away from the hand she held coaxingly on his arm. He stood back on his heels, with head up. Firmly he said—

"No, I won't!"

"But, Rand!"

"Yo' are lying to me! If General Beauregard cares about what happens heah it is because he knows you."

"Of course, he knows me!" Laura said in distressed exasperation. "I go across to his headquarters whenever I like. He thinks I am *his* spy. So—"

"And you must think I'm an awful fool." There was a slight drawl in Rand's slow, tolerant rebuke. "You mix things up the way you talk so I can't tell heads from tails most o' the time. But yo' wouldn't send me to General Beauregard and say tell 'im everything if he didn't *know* you was his spy, while yo' are making that General Heckle I heah so much about think you are his. That's how you've got both them generals lettin' you go back and forth between the lines. I ain't so big a fool as I must look!"

Mrs. Margate made a queer, low sound that was hastily checked. Laura drew back with a start. Her look was frightened and searching. She forced her lips into a slight quivering grimace.

"And if I am?"

The inflection went up, lingered, ris-

ing in inquiry. She received no answer.

"If I am General Beauregard's spy?" she insisted. "Will you tell Captain Terris that—"

"Him? No!"

"But Colonel Sherman?" Anxiety hovered about that question.

Rand shook his head.

"I sho'ly like him fine, but—"

"General Heckle might make you an officer! That is, if you could prove what you think. And, of course, tell him what happened here tonight."

Laura seemed bitterly resigned, as if she could effect nothing but a little taunting.

"I'm not going to tell anybody what I think." Rand wet his dry lips. He labored slowly to put the words in order. "But I think you got me out o' jail 'cause Old Bill said I was Southern. He could tell you wanted him to say that. Heah tonight, you wouldn't have shot that Major Clarky unless you was afraid of him yo'self. I'm all puzzled. Yo' are a mighty queer woman. But yo' are Southern. And I bet you are a spy—General Beauregard's spy."

"And if I am?" she asked again, staring from under an intent frown with lips tightly set.

"Well, co'se, if you are, that's bad, I reckon. But it don't make no diff'ence to me about him." Rand moved a hand. "That fellow needed shootin'."

He shook his head, troubled.

"If I get caught I'll get hung, I reckon."

"Do you mean that you are really going to say you killed him?" Laura leaned forward, incredulous, with lips parted, holding her breath.

"Yes'm. Befo' I let anybody think it was you, I will."

She glanced with veiled inquiry toward Mrs. Margate. The pale, sallow woman jerked her head in a warning shake. It seemed too much to trust any man with such a promise at such a time.

"But Miss Laura is not a spy!" The Margate woman's voice almost got beyond control in her desperation to explain. "Major Clarky was jealous because Miss Laura is a great favorite with General Heckle. And he was drunk; he didn't know what he was saying. You mustn't believe—"

Rand was not listening. He gestured abstractedly, wanting her to be quiet.

"I'm trying to think," he explained. He puckered his forehead. "Wonder if anybody knew he come heah?"

"I don't think so," said Laura as if she hazily sensed what Rand had in mind. "Why?"

"I've got a notion—may not be any good. But he's dead. He ought to be. An' I don't think anybody would evah know what happened if his body was toted off, would they?"

Laura shook her head.

"That is impossible!" But the next instant she became uncertain. She locked her fingers together, one hand folded into the other and pulling nervously. "Could it be done?"

"I'd prob'bly better go get Old Bill to he'p."

"No, no, you mustn't do that!" Mrs. Margate protested with flustered tone.

"You don't know Bill, ma'am."

"I do know that the more who learn of what has happened here, the more likely we are all to be arrested!"

"Bill knows mo' about keeping his mouth shut than any man you eveh saw. He had it in fo' that fellow, too."

"If it could be done—" Miss Laura admitted.

"It can be tried," said Rand. He grinned. "That's what Bob Perry said when he throwed his lariat at the moon!"

The women gazed at him stonily, seeing nothing to smile at, perhaps not even knowing what a lariat was.

"Unless you've got servants heah, who is to know?"

"There are no servants," Mrs. Margate told him, "except me."

"Some come in through the day, but go away at night," Laura explained.

"What about the nigger coachman that told—" Rand jerked his head to-

ward the next room.

"Too many people hated Major Clarky for any one to say who killed him. If you could—but how could you conceal the—the—" She motioned.

"I don't just know. My notion is that me and Bill could take it off somewhere—'way off. I reckon, like you say, they's plenty that hated the sight an' smell of him. So who's to guess what really happened?"

"If that could be done!" she said, and studied.

LAURA opened the door and looked through. Mrs. Margate nodded, but glanced distrustfully at Rand, who asked—

"Then I'll go talk with Bill?" Mrs. Margate shook her head at Laura, advising her not to trust him if he left the house.

"But if it could be done?" Laura repeated.

"An' Bill, he likes you!" said Rand with clear, guileless coaxing.

"First you must search his pockets." Laura pointed without looking.

"What fo'?"

"He did get an order to have you shot."

"I can't believe that!"

"I know you don't, and I want you to."

"I don't like doing something that looks like robbin' a dead man."

"You must do that, though. You must!"

"All right, then." He went to Major Clarky's body. He picked up the revolver, looking at it critically. It was a new Colt. "Nice gun." He put it to one side on the carpet.

The body lay face down. Rand took one lax arm and pulled. The body turned drunkenly. Clarky had been shot through the breast. Rand tried to avoid the blood, but the clothes were soaked. From an inside pocket he removed a thick wallet and papers.

Mrs. Margate spread a newspaper on the floor and knelt there. Rand put the bloodstained wallet on the newspaper. Miss Laura stood with unconscious shrinking and mouth tightly compressed. She seemed trying to overcome nausea.

Mrs. Margate reluctantly handled the papers and gave a slight start as she saw that the tips of her fingers were moistly red. She pulled at the lacy hem of a handkerchief tucked in a pocket of her skirt, wiped her fingers hard and let the handkerchief fall on to the newspaper.

She offered Laura an unfolded letter, but the girl refused, not wanting to touch it.

Mrs. Margate read aloud.

"Major Clarky, Sir:

"I shall arrange at once to furnish you the sum you stipulate for the favor of your protection during these distressing times."

Rand did not catch the name signed to the letter, but it was well known to the women. Laura said:

"Poor old man! Just because he was born in South Carolina. No wonder Major Clarky did not care about his gambling losses."

Mrs. Margate held out a crisp, heavy sheet of paper toward Rand in significant silence. The printing said: "War Department." The writing was an erratic scrawl. He frowned studiously, reading with difficulty.

Rand then looked up and said humbly—

"I 'pologize, miss!"

Laura motioned toward the fireplace.

"Burn it."

Rand took the order for his execution —which lacked nothing but the President's signature—and walked across the room. He bent down, poked the embers with the edge of the paper and held it there until the flame rose.

The wallet was filled with paper money.

"Please put this back," said Mrs. Margate when she had taken out everything but the money.

Rand returned the wallet with the money to the dead man's pocket.

"That'll make folks know he was killed honest, anyhow."

He stood up, then stooped again, wiping his fingers on the newspaper.

"Do I go tell Bill now?" Neither replied. Rand picked up his hat and poked at the crumpled crown. "Maybe he did think I was a spy."

"And to think," said Laura, "only this afternoon I used my influence with General Heckle to keep him from removing this man!"

"Why on earth, miss? After the way he treats us Southerners. And you didn't like this fellow."

"I hated him, but—" She checked herself.

"You could pull the wool over his eyes." Rand nodded. "If somebody else got the job, maybe you couldn't. That's it, I bet. Then you are sho' a spy!" He meditated, watching her. "You don't need look at me thataway. I'm not blamin' you. If you was even Jeff Davis's daughter I wouldn't care!"

Miss Laura's straight shoulders stiffened. She hesitated. Then with uncontrollable recklessness she said proudly, with challenge in her voice:

"I want you to know that in getting you out of jail I did a far greater favor than you realize! I am the daughter of Willis Willamotte!"

"Oh, Miss Laura!" Mrs. Margate cried out in anguished protest. "What ails you, chile?"

Laura watched for something that did not come to Rand's face. He was amazed by her tone and attitude, but that was all. No bubble of old memories broke into telltale expression.

"Don't you know what that means? Don't you know that every Willamotte feels bound to hate every Texas Lanister more than any Yankee that—"

"Miss Laura, I don't know, honest, why you act like I ought to get mighty mad, 'r something." Rand frowned, woefully perplexed. He groped for words. "If my father has a feud with youah folks, he neveh told me about it."

"But you know who I am? You know that I—"

"Miss Laura!" Mrs. Margate's voice, anxious and pleading, seemed to make the girl remember something that should not be spoken of.

It was all incomprehensible to Rand. He shook his head.

"But you know of me?" Her voice had the hurt sound of one who has suffered much and still expects to suffer.

"Honest I don't."

"No one has ever told you of Laura Willamotte?" She was too astonished to believe any denial he could make. "Your cousins—Judith? You must have heard!"

"Neveh."

He felt that he ought to say something more, but there was nothing more to say. He had told the truth.

Laura continued to watch, expecting to see some little betraying flicker in his eyes, or the twitch of a lip, which would let her know he was trying to spare her feelings in thus blankly denying that he had ever heard of the shame that had come upon her.

"I'm going fo' Bill!" he said stubbornly, and strode past her as if escaping.

MR. RAZE, barefoot—he never wore socks—sat in a rocker tilted back, his toes on a window ledge, and peered through tobacco smoke, looking placidly from the window down into the dimly lighted street. Rand closed the door quietly behind him.

"Bill?"

With one searching glance of his gray eyes, Mr. Raze knew that something was wrong.

"Bill, listen—"

Mr. Raze shifted the rocker without rising. His sunken eyes peered without winking as he listened. The pipe grew cold, nestling in the curve of his left hand. Now and then he grunted faintly, as if to indicate that he was not asleep.

"—so you and me are to take him off somewhere. Will you come?"

Mr. Raze knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the heel of his hand and blew through the reed pipestem. With a long reach he laid hold of a boot, poked the middle finger of each hand through the boot's ear and hooked it, hood-like, over his toes. He lay back, pulled, then stamped his foot down.

When his boots were on Bill arose, looked about for his hat and found it in a corner. He pulled it tightly over his head. Then he reached for the belt and knife dangling over a corner post at the head of the bed. He pulled a rusty old coat off a nail and put it on, slowly heaving his great shoulders. He had taken to wearing a coat because his buckskin blouse attracted so much attention.

"Hmm," said Mr. Raze, "I'm glad f'r to know she is purty as I thought."

MRS. MARGATE opened the front door and stared with distrust at the shaggy Mr. Raze. He probably looked as much like a villain as any man she had ever seen.

"This is Bill," Rand said, feeling he must say something.

She peered out of the door for a long time as if looking for some one else, then closed the door, bolted it and led the way upstairs.

The fire had died down to smokeless ashes. A sheet had been laid across the body, and the light was dimmed. No one was in the room.

"Where is Miss Laura?" Rand asked.

"She is ill, poor child! The dreadful shock was mighty hard on her."

"I reckon so."

Mr. Raze pulled off the sheet and dropped it behind him. He looked with no especial interest at the dead man, but turned to Rand.

"That off'cer's coat won't do. We got to ac' like we was helping a drunk man. Off'cers get gosh a'mighty drunk, but some other off'cer might be cur'ously helpful. An' the coat is all blood covered."

Rand nodded and grew thoughtful. Mrs. Margate hesitated; then, as if just remembering, she said:

"I think there is a private's blue coat somewhere downstairs. My brother had one. I will look."

"An' fetch a hat, too, ma'am," said Mr. Raze.

She went out. Mr. Raze took a chew of tobacco and sat down on the head of the sofa. He folded his clasped hands about one upraised knee and gazed at the ceiling. Rand watched the bedroom door, expecting that Miss Laura would certainly emerge.

Mrs. Margate returned with a coat and hat. Rand gave no hint of the suspicion that there were clothes in the house to help Mrs. Margate's "brother" mingle with soldiers and listen.

Mr. Raze leaned far back, eyed the knob of an andiron and then, suddenly jerking his head forward, he spat some ten feet, splashing the juice squarely on the andiron knob. Mrs. Margate flinched, disgusted. Mr. Raze bobbed his head in quiet satisfaction at having made a good shot.

Mr. Raze, with the methodical air of a man skinning a calf, raised Major Clarky's arm and pulled at one coat sleeve. He then held the body in a sitting posture and told Rand to pull the sleeve off the other arm. When the coat was off, Mr. Raze calmly tore the sheet, folded a band and made it fast over the wound in the breast. He did not want to leave a trail of blood. The private's coat was pulled on as if they were dressing a drunken man.

Rand, suddenly remembering something, reached into the pocket of the discarded coat and brought out the wallet. He pushed Mr. Raze's hands aside from the buttons he was fastening and forced the wallet into the inside pocket of the private's coat.

"What's that?" Mr. Raze inquired.

"Money. We don't rob a dead man!"

"Somebody shore will." Mr. Raze merely made an observation. He did not care. "Set on that hat. Pull 'er down hard." Rand fitted the hat.

Mr. Raze stood up, took one long step toward the fireplace and spat.

"Stick that pistol in your pocket, Ran'." He flipped his hand, pointing with a thumb. "That ain't like takin' money."

Rand looked at the revolver, then at Mrs. Margate.

"Take it," she said, but abstractedly. Her glance shifted in annoyance to the bespattered andiron and back to the red ooze on the carpet.

Mr. Raze got down on his knees ridiculously, as if about to pray, put his hands under the body, grunted and arose. The body lay across his massive shoulders. He walked ahead out of the room and down the stairs.

In the entrance hall he said—

"Now Ran', you get one o' his arms round your neck, an' we'll tote him like he was too drunk to stand."

When they were ready to go out, Mrs. Margate turned off the gas so no light would show. She unbolted the door and peered furtively into the darkness.

"I think it is all right." Her voice trembled.

"G'night, ma'am," said Mr. Raze impersonally.

Mrs. Margate did not reply. She closed the door quickly. The bolt clicked. She ran up the dark stairs, through the hall and entered a back room. After a moment of hurried fumbling in the darkness she struck a match and impatiently watched the blue sizzle of the sulphur tip turn into a tiny flame.

She lighted a candle, took it in her hand and stood before an uncurtained window. She moved the candle to and fro, back and forth across the window, signaling.

Miss Laura was in the shadows of the alleyway back of the stable, holding the bridle of a lean limbed horse. If the candle had merely been lighted, and not moved back and forth across the window, Miss Laura would at once have mounted and galloped off, knowing that Rand, after all, was not to be trusted and had brought policemen or soldiers back to the house with him.

CHAPTER VII

COLONEL SHERMAN

FOR a time there was excitement and mystified guessing in Washington over the murder of Major Clarky, whose body was found in a private's coat and hat, with a bandage of fine linen over his breast and money in his wallet, on a vacant lot behind a boozing shanty. It was a hard murder to solve. There were too many people glad of Clarky's death.

As a result of the murder the highest Government officials learned how criminally the military police had misused its powers. Officers and privates were summarily relieved from duty and sent into the camps; but Captain Terris continued on the staff of General Heckle, where his duties were really more of a social than a military nature.

William Tecumseh Sherman, caught in the whirligig changes of the day and being of the West Point caste, was suddenly placed in command of a brigade at Fort Corcoran, opposite Georgetown, under General Tyler. It seemed odd to many aspiring, self-confident officers, who hoped for a conspicuous place in the parade to Richmond, that Sherman bluntly swore he did not want and would not take a high command, saying he did not yet know enough to wear a general's boots. This was more than odd because, if he had wanted them, he was the one man who could have had big epaulets.

"Sherman's crazy!" men said.

That was to become almost a nation-wide opinion.

"And the hardest thing in the world," said Sherman, when the opinion became a popular conviction fostered by an-

gered newspapermen, "is to prove you're not crazy when people say you are!"

MR. RAZE sat on the ground in the warm Spring sun with his back to a stump. He and the stump appeared to be the only unagitated objects on the landscape. Even the leaves of the trees seemed to stir and shiver apprehensively. Everything looked like confusion and bullyragging to Mr. Raze. Bustle, hustle and noise was not the way to make war. Sutlers had grocery stores, as if the tented camp were a village; and young soldiers, wanting jam, clustered about like insects. Stovepipe hatted fellows, with rat-like eyes and checkered pants, strolled through the camp, with cards in coat pockets; and hucksters of all sorts wandered about, with everything from coffee pails to Bibles.

Mr. Raze had been sworn into the service side by side with Rand; but no one offered him a musket and monkey jacket with shiny buttons. By Colonel Sherman's orders he was attached to brigade headquarters for special duty. Mr. Raze did not know what the special duty was to be, and was incurious. Even if on the rolls as a private, Mr. Raze would tolerate no familiarity from privates or officers. He did once in awhile salute the flag.

There was a tall dark man by the name of Silliker, with a lined face and soft voice, very quiet of manner, erect, never in uniform though often addressed as captain, who at times loitered about Sherman's headquarters and tried to get familiar with Mr. Raze; but he might as well have tried to coax a bear into amiability.

Silliker also singled out Private Lanister for idle conversation; but Rand, detecting that he was a Southerner, had a vague suspicion of the captain and was laconically cautious.

Mr. Raze detested the Army's noisy way of getting things done. Bugles squalled at men, setting them astir from the mushroom rows of tents like a stick in an anthill. Drums rattled. Officers of every kind, from the gold-collared to the stripe-armed, bawled, swore, sweated—all with energetic fuss. Horsemen galloped about with pretentious self-esteem, jangling sabers. Poor riders, most of them. Nearly every day some soldier was shot by the accidental discharge of a musket.

Mr. Raze, in a state of a meditative disgust, sat with his back to the stump and observed the camp. If he took any sort of stroll, something was sure to happen. Time after time some prettily dressed boy with a new tin sword had frowningly halted Mr. Raze and questioned him, or tried to. Mr. Raze's laconic insolence made soldier-strapped youths fretfully perspire. In their hopeful eyes he looked just like a sullen Southern mountaineer, who had come to lurk in camp and report military secrets. But when messengers were hurried to Colonel Sherman's headquarters, they brought back word to let the old fellow alone.

Mr. Raze had another grievance. Rand, whom he had taught from boyhood to handle guns both long and short, was jammed in among recruits. And in the awkward squad Rand stumbled and fumbled as if he were club-footed and thumb-fingered. They were making Rand carry a musket their way, which was a derogatory reflection on Mr. Raze's instruction.

The sweetest moment so far in Mr. Raze's Army life came when he straggled along after Rand's company to target practice. The sarcastic little old Army sergeant, whom Colonel Sherman had somehow purloined to cuss the clerks and plowboys into shape, growled humbly:

"I'm damned, Lan'ster, if ever in thirty years soldierin' I seen the like! You hold your gun the wrong way, but don't miss nothin'!"

Mr. Raze now broodingly watched Rand's company at drill. Across the wide road from Mr. Raze's stump an

aide or two sat with slouching ease on stools. Horses were tied to a pole that lay between the forked posts.

A soft, soggy trample of hoofs caused the aides to turn their heads and then rise quickly. Colonel Sherman, followed by a mounted orderly, rode up, stepped from the saddle and tossed the reins to the orderly.

Colonel Sherman moved his hand in a careless but nervously quick acknowledgment of the aides' salute, wheeled, glanced about, spoke jerkily, laughed a little and went inside. The aides sat down. The orderly, holding the reins, squatted on his heels and plucked a blade of grass, nibbling the tip, idly watching the recruits drill in the camp street.

The rigid little sergeant's husky, fierce voice could be heard shouting:

"Prod the wax out o' your years an' pay 'tention. C'mp'ny, 'shun! Load in ten times. Load!"

With waggling uncertainty the company's left arms swung out, right feet were plunked forward, some as if stepping on a snake's head. Right hands shifted backward toward the cartridge boxes.

"Han'le, cart-ige!"

Fingers groped in the cartridge boxes and right hands swished up, poising before mouths as if doubtfully about to bite plugs of tobacco.

"Tear cart-ige!"

Men's teeth snapped at imaginary cartridges, some with realistic side pull, very much like the pantomime of tearing off a bite of tough meat.

Mr. Raze grunted in profound disgust at all this ritualistic monkey-capering. But officers were to learn that recruits could not be overtrained in proper loading. In the excitement of battle more than half the soldiers might load their guns wrong. Some two years later Gettysburg was fought by veterans; and of the twenty-four thousand loaded muskets picked up at random on the field, only twenty-five per cent were properly loaded.

Sherman was a great drillmaster; and Sergeant Gnowtal seemed to think the fate of the nation hung upon the instruction he gave these "snooties."

"Charge *cart*-ige!" the sergeant yelped.

Men jerkily tilted elbows and fumbled in pouring non-existent powder into gun barrels. Some imaginatively pretended to shake in even the last drop of black flecks.

"Draw ram'r!"

With disorderly raggedness of extending arms the ramrods came out.

The sergeant groaned as if his dinner had suddenly come to life.

"As y'were—as y'were! My Heavenly Father, don't look! Then ram'rs ain't clubs ner switches, damn't! Y'ought to be settin' on yer maws' knees gettin' kissed! Thet the Lord in his wisdum let sech fools live to be man-growed is enough to make an inferdel outer me! Burn my father's pants, 'f I ever seen sech idgits!"

The drill went on through elaborate motions until "Prime!" brought the bayoneted muzzles into a menacing lift and the rattle of half cocked gunlocks chirruped along the company line.

The sergeant loudly expressed his doubts that the war, even if eternal, would last half long enough for this company to learn to load at will. It was a terrible company. In thirty years of service he had never seen such a mess of blockheads. Heavenly Father damn his soul if four-legged jackasses couldn't learn quicker than these two-legged ones! Then the deepest, blackest insult of thirty years' study in such matters landed on their heedless heads—

"You ort to be Gov'ment teamsters!"

SERGEANT GNOWTAL talked until he felt better, then had bayonet drill. He walked behind the line, poking his gun butt into the knee hinges of men who didn't squat bowlegged enough to resist an infantry charge; walked in front, making personal remarks to men

who didn't lift the bayonet tip four feet higher to meet the cavalry.

"My gosh, look! Thar's a hoss with a man on it! Look at 'im!" the sergeant begged as he pointed toward an officer, who galloped with bobbing elbows and loose-swaying legs.

Rand, tensely trying to do well enough to avoid the sergeant's tongue, glanced up the street too hastily to recognize the blackbearded horseman as Captain Terris. Hundreds of officers were bearded, many of them blackbearded.

Captain Terris dismounted at the colonel's headquarters, very stiffly saluted the aides who arose from their stools, then stalked inside. The officers, knowing him very well since he was out of one of Sherman's regiments, laughed at the freshly acquired pomp.

By various evolutions the sergeant brought his company nearer Mr. Raze and the stump. Mr. Raze tried to keep his eyes on Rand, who was the only man in the company, or Army, he cared about.

Rand, with solemn alertness, was trying to be a good soldier. At times in excessive eagerness he would turn the wrong way at the word of command, and be sharply invited by the sergeant to stay up nights and study which was his right hand, which his left.

But this raw-flecking, tongue-snapping sergeant could not really anger Rand; and this was why: Some of the fellows had mockingly imitated the Texan's accent. The sergeant had said:

"I hear any more o' that, an' I'll make you fool snooties wish God in his mercy had killed ye at birth! You blasted idgits, didn't ye ever hear of the Alamo?"

Apparently nobody had; but one went inquiringly to the chaplain about it, and came back with enormous respect for Texans.

Mr. Raze was now irritated by hearing the sergeant bawl:

"Hi, you Lan'ster! Don't poke yer chin out like you was kissin' a girl!"

Titters ran along the line. One guffawed, hopeful of being singled out as most appreciative of the sergeant's wit.

He was, with:

"Wilkins, you sound like a sick calf bellerin'. No girl that wasn't blind ever kissed you. Hold your belly in and keep your mouth shet!"

The sergeant maneuvered his company with half an eye on the headquarter's doorway, but kept the men too busy to let them have a suspicion of what he was up to. Out of the corner of his eye the sergeant saw the blackbearded officer come out, speak with a conscious air of superiority to the friendly aides, then turn with a stiff legged stride toward his horse.

An instant later a tall form was hazily visible, standing with his back to the doorway for a moment; then, with a parting wave to some one within, Colonel Sherman stepped out.

At once the sergeant shouted—

"Squads right, hump!"

The men swung into line squarely before the colonel.

"Comp'ny, halt!" the sergeant bellowed. "Right dress!"

He peered as if aiming a gun along the rigid row of breasts, patting the air to push some men back, calling them by name.

"Front!"

Sergeant Gnowtal marched with his short legged strut to the front and faced the company.

"Pree-ee-sent, harm!"

There was a ragged, hearty slap of hands on stocks as the bayoneted guns came up, very much like slender saplings behind which each man was rigidly trying to hide.

The sergeant spun on toe and heel with an about-face and saluted. The company stood in attitudes of labored rigidity, straining tense muscles to look like regulars, and in their hearts were grateful to the sour old sergeant for having maneuvered them into a chance to offer a salute to the colonel. They cunningly knew the sergeant wouldn't

have done that if he wasn't a little proud of them.

Captain Terris, fitting stirrup to foot by hand, had made a clawing scramble into the saddle, and was momentarily pleased by thinking the salute was in his honor. He waved his hand in a wide salute, snapping his forearm; and this, together with a sudden jump of the horse, knocked off his hat. Embarrassment flushed his face; and a pained, wincing sickliness came into his look as he saw that he had taken a salute meant for Colonel Sherman, who stood in the doorway.

Sherman's keen, restless eyes swept the company. Soldiers were no doubt pleased to exaggerate when they boasted, later in the war, that with little more than a sweeping glance he could count the unpolished buttons of an entire company front. For Sherman did have the genius for detail that gave rise to such stories.

Now the company thought he must be critically studying every detail and they struggled, tense and motionless, to endure the inspection.

What Colonel Sherman most likely looked at with such lingering scrutiny were the young faces—the faces of boys from the chore work of farms; youths from city homes, who thought war was a lark, with the worst of it sweating at drill and fatigue duty.

Sherman was a savage disciplinarian when he chose, but very informal, even bantering, with enlisted men. He did not need shoulder straps or epaulets to make men respect him. Before the war ended an army of a hundred thousand men were to call him Uncle Billy; and it takes a lot of confidence, respect and affection to make men call an officer of any sort uncle.

Sherman smiled, pleased.

"Fine boys, Sergeant—fine!" he called.

His hand moved, but did not rise high enough to complete the salute because he checked it as he turned with an alert jerk of his head, swore and started forward helpfully.

Captain Terris, in embarrassment and haste, had jerked and spurred his horse in trying to make him stand directly over the hat that had fallen. He swung off, snatched the hat and remounted; but before he was firmly seated the nervous horse shied, jumped, and the rider fell.

His loud squeal had terror in it, and with cause: His left foot was caught in the stirrup.

The horse reared, swirling, came down with head up and fear-struck eyes. It was terrified by the unfamiliar dangling of a man fastened to a stirrup; and the man writhed and cried out, clawing upward at the fastened foot.

The aides beside Sherman ran forward too, hands out.

The horse wheeled, dodging their hands, stopped stiff legged, jumped, then broke into a gallop and was increasingly frightened by the dangling, screaming thing, head down, that could not be shaken off.

Rand broke ranks with a leap, pitching his musket to the ground. Range training was stronger than a week of Army drill. He pushed the rigid sergeant to one side in passing and ran on.

The sergeant, taught to stand fast though the heavens fell, yelped hoarsely. Rand was not conscious of showing menace as he lurched at Sherman's orderly, but the orderly drew away as if from a madman. The reins of the colonel's horse were plucked from the orderly's slack grip and, with an upward toss, passed over the horse's head. Rand locked his fingers in the mane; and the horse was already springing forward when Rand, flying upward with bent knees, jumped from the ground squarely into the saddle.

Mr. Raze, standing on top of his stump, saw Colonel Sherman sway back, almost knocked over; saw him wave a long arm, heard the crisp:

"Good! That's it! Good! Ride like hell!"

TO BE CONTINUED

Wise Son

By B. E COOK

OLD King Solomon packed a heap of wisdom in his Proverbs. But he certainly muffed one when he declared: "A wise son maketh a glad father."

Christopher Trask was chief engineer of the sardine packet *Gull*. He had reared his son an engineer—had reared young Chris "in the way he should go." He had done it by Solomon's Proverbs, also by means of wrenches, steam gages and his books on the marine engine. And young Chris had learned plenty; so much, in fact, that he had shed his dad like a cocoon and taken wings in flight. He was still soaring.

And Chief Trask? He was still the top engineer of a sardine packet on the Maine coast.

This morning the chief clutched a letter in his greasy fist. It was from young Chris, already the first assistant engineer of a big, coastwise passenger liner. Chris was climbing fast—too fast for his own good, Trask feared—in the Great Eastern Fleet. This letter reeked of a swollen head; it even became patronizing in spots.

Young Chris had suddenly become a wise son.

But the chief was proud of his son; for the lad was no ordinary marine engineer. Perhaps in him the father's dream would come true. Young Chris in swanky gold braid; young Chris the fount of authority over other engineers at huge engines!

Trask sighed. Not that he begrudged his boy these swiftly won honors; but a strange, instinctive uneasiness curdled his pride. Young Chris was feeling his oats. He was already too sure of himself. Advancement had come too easily. The Great Eastern people had given him every chance to get ahead, given him all the breaks. He hoped the kid appreciated that. His boy owed that great concern the best he could give it. Loyalty was built into Chief Christopher Trask alongside his backbone.

All his life he had hoped, had pictured himself chief engineer of one of those beautiful liners. He had expected to make the grade, say, in his thirties. The thirties had still found him in a packet. They left him there, but left him a positive genius at working marvels with steam engines.

He studied. He experimented. He became something of an expert on propellers. Yes, in his forties he would get the big chance. He saw himself in gold braid promenading those luxurious saloon decks, in dungarees showing eager assistants things not available in books about their big babies. What a dream!

But today Chief Trask reluctantly admitted that his life's schedule was dragging like an overpitched screw. He glanced at a shadow crossing the coaming obliquely; it was a man from the office ashore.

"Mr. Marr says come to his office at two o'clock," said the messenger. His voice had a note of pity in it.

"MR. TRASK, due to hard times, we're making several changes in Maine Shore Fisheries personnel."

Trask's dream of bigger ships and bigger jobs evaporated then and there. He had hung on, held his own thus far into the forties; now must come the inevitable down grade. He recognized his demotion instantly.

"The new chief of the *Gull* is a Mr. Berry. You go as his first assistant," the voice went on.

Mr. Marr felt relieved with that off his chest—until he beheld the ex-chief's struggling, proud features.

"Oh, yes," he added hastily, "you're still our magician, sir; we'll depend on you to work your miracles on the engines of all five boats, as usual. I consider you have a record to be proud of. Never in your long career, I understand, never have you been towed in because of engine trouble. Mr. Trask—" Marr's soft, fat hand reached over his desk—"I congratulate you on a remarkable record—oh, yes, and on a very promising son. You seem to have worked miracles on that fellow, too."

Trask went through the motions of a handshake. His brain did not. Twenty-five years he had dreamed and hoped; now it was only a dream. Perhaps young Chris's style had been best, at that; he was going up by leaps, already established in a big G. E. liner. Trask had secretly aimed his own career at the G. E. fleet. To him nothing else on the water counted.

But now . . . The ship's clock on the wall tinkled five strokes; Trask had been here thirty minutes; not a word out of him.

"Aye, sir," he grunted at last as Marr ran out of words again. "First assistant. Aye, sir."

He shifted his quid to hide a trembling lip. The door slammed to his yank on the knob.

WELL, Chief, even so. Even so. You've done your share of the world's work; what if you are demoted? It'll be easier. I'm making plenty now; you can depend on me, Chief.

Thus wrote Chris Trask's son from the heights of heady success. Trask's Down East independence flared. He a dependent? Beholden to a son who wrote him patronizing letters? Never!

Young Chris proved extremely cocky on a five-day visit. He told and retold his accomplishments:

"Yeah, first assistant now. I'm being groomed, they say, for chief's berth on that big *Amherst*— Wha-a-a-t! Say, the *Amherst's* the fastest thing on this coast. Absotively!" Yes, young Chris had secured his chief's papers too.

"So you'll go on up in Great Eastern ships," said old Chris, half to himself one night, gazing toward the dock.

"Me?" Young Chris tapped a superior hand on his father's bent shoulders. "Listen, Chief, that's how you get where you are—not. You've stuck by Maine Shore Fisheries, and what hap-

pened? You're stalled on their dirty sardine tubs. Now me, I'm on big stuff already, but that's not gonna be a ball and chain, not on my foot!"

Chris turned, wide-eyed.

"What's this?"

"I'm going ahead just as fast as there's chances, and where there's no chances I'll make 'em!"

The father shook his head:

"Too much boasting, son. Too much *I*. Never you forget, the ship's the first consideration always. You know engines, and with engines like those—" His words trailed into silence. Big, smooth, shining pistons, massive cylinders, gold braid that meant volumes!

A laugh brought him out of his reverie.

"That's your idea. You always were goofy about engines. Oh, I like 'em too, and I've got beauties on that *Amherst;* but with me the big consideration is advancement, prestige. That's my course. I'm gonna be chief engineer of the *Amherst* next; Chief Lambert is getting old; they'll ditch him soon."

Trask winced; he, too, had been ditched.

"Trouble with you is this, Chief: you've stuck by smaller boats too long. It makes a man small minded, holds him back. What a man needs is a real job on a real ship."

It never once occurred to the gold-braided young hustler that Chief, as he called his dad, had made him, put him where he was today. Many a deep-water engineer was thanking Chris nowadays for a score of tricks that were not found in their books.

ONE night the *Gull* got caught offshore in a southeaster. Her new chief, fresh from a yacht, marveled at what was supposed to be her engine. When the propeller swooped aloft above seas, the engine roamed on its bed. When the blades cut deep under water, steam stole through leaks that big Chris had incessantly kept closed, with the dogged realization that hard-driven owners depended on him to do so.

But Chief Berry was different. He had come fresh from a beautiful toy, a yacht. Never had he seen a battered veteran power plant fight as this one fought. It scared him. He called it junk, cursed it, saw a hundred neglected adjustments and loose nuts he should have stymied in better weather. Now, helpless, he shuddered until his second assistant caught him in the jitters.

Four miles off Petite Cote Light, in the dismal mid-watch, Gabriel blew his horn in the old *Gull's* mid-regions. Howling, screaming, runaway steam made volcanic music. It packed the engine room. Clouds of it rolled into the stokehold, above in the passageway.

It drifted into Trask's new, reduced quarters. His long, thin nose wiggled professionally, even in his sleep. His eyes popped open. Then he heard the unmistakable hiss that is the ceaseless dread of engineers.

Chris found Berry stretched on the lower gratings; he had slammed the stokehold door and flopped.

Hanging over a stairhead above lay Darby, the second engineer. Condensing steam trickled into a stream of blood coursing down his shoulder, out along an extended arm. Where was the third assistant?

Chris was short, but he was also as wiry as his tongue. He recognized a blown cylinder head. He moved big Darby into the passageway, yelled for help above the bedlam and got Berry upstairs where the oilers groped into the wild fog behind the Third, a mere kid.

The *Gull* hove to, but her skipper raised no radio call for assistance; he knew what Trask could do.

And Trask did it. He performed some artistic packing while firemen collected the bolts the explosion had scattered. With equal art he made his work appear to be Berry's orders, while Berry, now at his elbow, put up a bluff at supervising it.

Near morning Chris whispered in

Berry's ear:

"Those valves or their rods 'll be bound. Have the Third clear them."

"Hey, Third, what the hell? Can't you clear your valves?" barked Berry officiously.

The bluff worked.

But there came a new manager over Maine Shore Fisheries who couldn't be bluffed.

THE new manager boarded the *Gull* when she docked in Portland; he himself would see what had happened. Also, it was his policy to understand and plumb the men who sailed for his office.

This time he nosed all around with his understanding, practiced nose. He talked with captain and chief. The chief was proud of his job on that blown cylinder—until Mr. Gross put a few straight questions to him. Gradually it came out; it was Chris who had tinkered the engine back to work.

Gross happened to ask:

"Chris Trask? Any relation to that Trask we've had on the *Amherst?*"

Berry was too flabbergasted by many things to answer that one. He didn't know. New management, credit going to his first assistant—where would he get off now?

Mr. Gross located the next man he was looking for on the stern. He had the interests of Great Eastern in mind when he said, with calculated abruptness—

"Mr. Trask, have you a son in your profession?"

"Aye, sir. He's first assistant on the big *Amherst.*"

"He was," Gross corrected. "You've read in the papers about a Bestt Line that's to compete with our Portland-New York liners?"

Chris had. Young Chris had made big talk of it lately.

"Your son plans to jump the *Amherst* to go chief on the very ship that'll run against her. He talks of quitting us."

Chris gave him an unbelieving stare.

"You see," Gross explained, "Great Eastern has taken over this fish business. I'm the new manager here for them, so I know."

Chris got up, eyeing the man belligerently.

"That, sir, about my son is impossible. He might talk—"

"He will act. He's refused our company's request to reconsider his plans."

That afternoon came a letter from a New York hotel to Chris Trask:

> The Bestt Line has offered me the big prize, Chief. I can go chief engineer on either ship, their S. S. *Stars* or their S. S. *Bars. Some* boost for yours truly. I'm accepting to go on the *Bars.* Why? Because she's scheduled to run against the old *Amherst,* and I happen to know that she can beat that scow any old trip. You watch us! The Great Eastern people are going to hang crape on that old turtle's bows before Fourth of July. She is slower than molasses. I'll show them!

Chris hove that letter into the dock; only a month ago young Chris had bragged of *Amherst* speed. Fury flared scarlet before his eyes. He groped into the passageway to his room, somehow assembled pen and paper and spread his judgment in ink:

> You're blind. You can't see beyond your nose. Great Eastern is your best bet for two reasons: It will never let a fly-by-night line grab off its public no matter what the cost; and, Chris, you owe that line your present high rating.
>
> Those people have lifted you where you are, you fool! Stick by them while they need you; good men are good stickers. More than this, you're going to be nothing but a rolling stone. You are heading for a big fall. Loyalty, son. That is what counts in the long years ahead of you.
>
> From one who knows,
>
> —CHIEF.
>
> P.S.: A fool despiseth his father's instructions. Prov. 15-5.

Back came a night letter. Chris got it the next trip to Portland. It was a pæan of boast and triumph:

> WRONG AGAIN CHIEF STOP AM NEW CHIEF ENGINEER OF BESTT LINES

FASTEST SHIP SS BARS WITH ORDERS TO CUT ONE HOUR OFF AMHERSTS RUNNING TIME OF 20 HOURS PORTLAND TO NEW YORK STOP PEPPING UP THE BARS FOR IT NOW STOP WATCH OUR SUDS

C CLINTON TRASK
CHIEF ENGINEER SS BARS

Pepping her up, eh? C. Clinton now; no longer Chris Trask, junior. Humph! And just how much did C. Clinton remember about those early lessons on pepping a marine engine? Chris had his doubts. He writhed inwardly to see his son drop his dad's given name, too.

"A wise—aye, a wise, disloyal son maketh—not a glad father," he murmured piecemeal.

One week later the *Gull* went down the coast for a freight of canned sardines at several ports. The instant her guard bumped the fish wharf at Herring Cove her doughty first assistant engineer leaped ashore. He came back in a daze, his head buried in a newspaper. Berry watched him stumble aboard. He followed Chris to his room, lest the man faint en route, for he looked all in, dismayed.

When Berry reached the door he read the headlined story over Chris's shoulder. It ran:

New Bestt liner beats *Amherst,* New York to Portland. *S.S. Bars* cuts 63 minutes off *Amherst's* time on first trip. Chief C. Clinton Trask, former *Amherst* engineer, shows his former vessel his heels. Great blow to Great Eastern. Their *S.S. Dartmouth* expected to match the Bestt Liner *Stars,* but G.E. officials admitted this morning they can not better *Amherst's* present speed . . .

Chris took it hard; he could not realize, of course, that Bestt Line interests were behind such publicity. But the Great Eastern was his company now; it should be his son's company—and that son was disgracing it.

He began to figure on the *Amherst.* She rated 12,000 horsepower; her twin screws turned up 150 revolutions a minute; she carried, he recalled, 250 pounds of steam in Scotch boilers. That should drive her maybe twenty knots if her propellers were right and if a dozen other things . . .

But it hadn't done so.

Chris visualized the *Amherst's* condensers; were they big enough? And those screws—was it slippage or pitch or—confound that young swellhead! By degrees Chris raised a fever to do something about speeding up the *Amherst.*

In the end, he went on watch in the old *Gull,* a somber father, stung by his son's disloyalty.

IN THE meantime traffic manager Harmon of the Great Eastern, in New York, got a letter from Gross. Gross claimed he had a genius aboard the *Gull* who should be set aboard the *Amherst* to apply his talent.

Harmon answered no!

Certain newspapers featured the situation between the Great Eastern and the Bestt lines. Harmon was bedeviled by reporters from dailies that were, in fact, under the influence of Bestt stockholders. When Harmon refused them interviews, he read interviews he had never given. And the traffic quit the *Amherst* to stand on the decks of the *Bars* and see their ship leave the *Amherst* astern.

Memorial Day traffic and 4th of July passenger lists set the season's pace on that Down East run. They had set it for years in the Great Eastern records.

The *Amherst* led the *Bars* out of New York by five minutes on the night before Memorial Day. She led the way out by Steppingstones Light. She maintained her lead at Cornfield Lightship. She was first through the Race.

When they docked in Portland, however, the *Bars's* passengers were all ashore, had left the waterfront an hour before. Chief C. Clinton and his skipper had paced that race to throw thrills into it; the *Bars* had withheld her speed for the daylight part of the voyage when all passengers would be on deck

to witness it. Ashore, they would spread the story in a thousand directions.

Chris Trask, in a little Down East harbor, read the story of that run.

"I—I won't have it!" he stormed. "I'll have Gross get me the chance. I'll doctor that *Amherst*. I'll show Chris!" he muttered.

No, he wasn't looking for advancement, only the chance to inspect those *Amherst* engines and talk with her chief. Then he'd come back satisfied. No longer did he hope for a chief's berth on a big liner; he was motivated by loyalty and a father's conviction that his inflated son must be brought to his better senses before he take a fall that might break him permanently.

But Chris was far down the coast; he couldn't talk to Gross, let alone the *Amherst's* chief. So he wrote a letter to Gross in Portland.

Gross banged his desk when he read it.

"I knew it!" he shouted, and straightway called New York.

" . . . and I tell you he's a genius, Harmon. You've tried everything your engineers can show you, now give this old veteran of mine a chance at the *Amherst*. Come on, Harmon; he's r'aring to go!"

"You're crazy, Gross. He's only a small-boat man—"

"That's where your talent comes from. And don't you forget," Gross reminded him, "if the *Amherst* trails the *Bars* into Portland on the afternoon before the glorious Fourth, mister, your Portland line is all shot to pieces for the season."

"Are you telling me?"

"And," Gross added warningly, "you'll have that Bestt Line on your trail for another season, and many more. Do you know what that'll mean?"

"Go on, I'll bite," snapped Harmon.

"It means you'll have to build two brand new, expensive, fast ships for this run or go out of business."

"Oh, hell! Gross, get on to yourself; your white hope up there is the father of Chief Trask on the *Bars;* he's not going to make the *Amherst* beat his own son's ship."

Gross laughed into the phone.

"Won't, hey? I've been watching my man; you haven't. He's disgusted with his son's accomplishments."

"Disgusted!"

"Precisely. He made that son a good engineer and shoved him up into your big ships where he, himself, always dreamed he'd land. Now he sees his son turning against the very liner that gave him his chance. He's mad to the bone. Harmon, take a chance on him; he wants to look over the *Amherst's* power plant."

"Bet you two hundred to fifty he proves a flop!" shouted Harmon.

"I'll take you up!" Gross countered.

"Have your Christopher Trask on my carpet not later than 7 A.M. July 2nd. I'll be waiting for your marvel."

THE *Gull* was four hours west of Bass Harbor that noon when a hydroplane landed alee, grabbed off Chris Trask and set him ashore in Portland with nothing better than his weathered old uniform to wear into the presence of Thurber Gross.

"Trask, get the next plane to New York," cried Gross. "The *Amherst's* on her way there now. Rest up in New York tonight—and do some figuring. Your chance has come! Man, I'm laying fifty against two hundred that you'll get the *Amherst* here day after tomorrow—July 3rd—before that *Bars* docks. What say?"

"Why, I haven't seen her engines yet. I don't know what's been done to speed 'er up, but I—you're betting?"

Chris was yet under the effects of his first air ride. Besides, propeller pitch, skegs, eccentrics and valves flooded his brain. Nothing made sense. And day after tomorrow was too soon; suppose he discovered that the *Amherst* needed new screws. Chris was water-logged,

fogbound.

"Before the *Bars!*" insisted Gross shrilly. "That's your job."

"Maybe she's churning; maybe too much pitch to her screws," Chris protested in a daze. "She's got all Summer ahead of her; might have to haul out on drydock for new screws."

"Not after the 3rd o' July—if she trails the *Bars* here on that trip," countered Gross fiercely.

Then he grasped Trask's viewpoint—but he had promised great things over the phone; he went desperately at Trask from a different angle. He leveled a finger at Chris's long nose.

"Trask, that ship-jumping son of yours got us into this hole, after we'd brought him up in this same *Amherst* too."

Trask's gray eyes narrowed.

"And I put him up there myself," he grated between set teeth.

Suddenly he leaned over Gross's desk.

"Mister, I'll shove yer *Amherst* here ahead o' the *Bars* if it shakes her whole skin off 'm 'er!"

Just that, and away he went to New York.

JULY 2nd was a strange day aboard the *Amherst.* Double lines went ashore abeam; triple lines astern to the strongest bollards. The engines turned over for a solid hour; first portside, then starboard. Over the stern in a boat hung a short, wiry human bundle of curiosity with eyes and ears piqued for performance. He peered, grunted and listened at the ship's screw action. His eye traveled along with whirlpools on the wake, gaging them, accounting for their width, their upward tendencies.

Chris Trask, pro tem chief of the *Amherst,* returned aboard with one unshakable conviction: those propellers had too low a pitch ratio; water was slipping off their blades. Wasted motion.

But the cure for that was new propellers. New propellers meant a long, overnight stall in drydock. He knew it was out of the question now; he must sail tonight—on the fastest run in the *Amherst's* career. Now then, what to do?

Satisfied that shafts, bearings and beds could stand great strain, Chris inspected the cylinders. They were all right.

He abruptly cut the cynical grins on his assistants' faces by ordering a gun drill, high speed tools and two engineers below. They tapped new keyways in the eccentrics that time the valves. Each was cut exactly forty-five hundredths of an inch in advance of the former position. The long rods to valve chambers were then set in their new positions. The clock read 4:31; only twenty-nine minutes to test this bold innovation and warm up for the race.

Chris checked every detail himself. He started the big pistons on slow, experimental plunges. Immediately he sensed the change he had sought. If only he had had a chance to observe them at sea. But he hadn't, so he took the long chance that his day's bold work would not prove fatal.

Ten minutes of five found him in the captain's cabin.

"And they let us lead them all the way to the Vineyard, Chief," the Old Man was growling. "Then, sir, woof! They left us astern. Next morning they left us like a tow of barges. That's their tactics."

"I see C. Clinton's brain in that; he'll not try it but that once, though," murmured Trask. "Cap'n, Chief Trask of the *Bars* doesn't know I'm here. Don't let him know. Now let's do the run thisaway: take a lead at the very start and hold it like a bulldog. By golly, we'll add to it. We will!"

But they reckoned not on their rivals' cunning. They, too, realized the absolute necessity of winning this 4th of July run to Maine. Instead of clearing their dock at five o'clock sharp as usual, they were actually in the stream at one minute of five with all

staterooms oversold and mobs crowding their rails.

That one minute gave the *Bars* a big lead; it let her down the Hudson just before two ferries got in the usual way. It left the *Amherst* behind to dodge both ferries and a sluggish car float. Just like heaving obstacles behind, that move.

Chris himself stood close to the throttles until Hell Gate, the Brothers and Steppingstones were passed. Then he went on deck.

His eyes popped. The *Bars* stood a good six lengths ahead of him, smoke streaming and cut-water creaming! He scurried below. At his command, twelve thousand horses leaped—not suddenly, but by degrees; Chris was feeling out the effects of his tinkering. Also he was saving extreme power for later.

The gap closed one length. Off Bridgeport the crowd on the *Bars* watched flames leap above the horizon from Bridgeport stacks. While they did so, the *Amherst* gained another ship's length on them.

Eight bells banged. Eight o'clock, a new shift. Chris stood right there and guided their every motion; this was a personal race with him. His career hung by a thread, and his son, C. Clinton, ached for a spanking.

At nine o'clock the *Amherst* hung on the *Bars's* snowy white quarter. Inch by inch she was eating down that ill-gotten advantage. At this rate she'd pass the *Bars* about midnight.

At midnight Chris took a slug of bitter black coffee. He was weary—hadn't really slept since he'd left Bass Harbor two days ago. Now he went above for another look. He got it—plenty. He looked directly abeam into the *Bars's* passageways from decks to saloons. Not a compass degree's variation marked the grinding struggle of these two big greyhounds. Chris was delighted.

"Ho, ho, my son," he laughed, "you're as transparent as glass!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Captain Bunce, who had trailed him outside.

"What? They beat the gun at the start—"

"Certainly did. Rotten ethics, too, but—"

"Then they opened up and tried to increase their lead. Now we're abreast of 'em, by hell, and forcing the life out of 'em!"

The words were scarcely out of Chris's mouth when something went dead wrong. The *Bars* took her bearings from Race Rock Light, wheeled on to the new course and left the *Amherst* as if she were anchored!

A loud, familiar guffaw floated over her stern to the grim little man on the *Amherst*. It rang in his ears like a bell-buoy on a lee shore. C. Clinton Trask had worked the same old trick on Chris that he had played on his predecessor on the last trip. The only difference this time was that he dared not wait until broad daylight to stage it; this trip was too important.

Chris writhed within. That vocal barb bit deep into his soul. He cracked his fists together impulsively and ran below.

"We're trailin'," he shouted. "We've gotta get the lead again. We've gotta beat that *Bars* to the Shoals. Keep every steam gage kickin' over 250. Open 'er up!"

Maybe they didn't! Block Island breezed past. The Vineyard Lightship's red clusters wove erratic circles in the sky from the bow waves. Smells of the land that usually waft aboard from the Vineyard whistled over the *Amherst* in her terrific spurt for that first chance over the Shoals.

SHE overhauled the *Bars* between Nobsky and Hedge Fence. Nip and tuck the two fighters lathered on for Cross Rip. The *Bars* stood to starboard of the *Amherst*, due to clever maneuvering by Captain Bunce and his pilot.

Chris got a report of it. He made the most of the first advantage he'd won; like a racehorse that has gotten the pole at last, he spurred the ship into a mad dash. Soon thereafter, he knew, the channel would narrow dangerously; one ship must lead the other over the sands.

Suddenly the telegraphs jingled. Their indicators came to rest on Half Speed.

Chris couldn't leave his engineroom. He phoned the pilothouse, demanded again the reason for such deviltry when he had just placed the vessel in the lead.

"Fog, Chief. Thicker'n gravy. Shut across us like a dirty blanket. Darsn't risk speed over the Shoals tonight."

Chris bit off a double chew of plug. He stamped out on deck, willy-nilly. There stood Hedge Fence Lightship in clear, balmy weather astern. Directly over the *Amherst's* bows loomed a curtain of murk; somewhere near, but muffled from view, sat Cross Rip Lightship. He could barely hear her dismal horn bawling its warning. And the *Bars?* She was nowhere to be seen; the damp cloud engulfed the *Amherst* before Chris could cross to the starboard side to look for her there.

He cursed himself for not releasing that hidden, extra power he'd built into his engines.

"Maybe it's me that's the dumb fool," he admitted.

"Yes, indeed," said a passenger's modulated voice rising off a deck chair, "yes, siree. This race is all off. Fog has settled that score."

"Not by a damsite!" rumbled Chief Trask on his way below. "The instant we get clear o' this I'm gonna rip." He stormed on and on in his chagrin.

That was at precisely 4:24 on the fateful morning of the 3rd of July.

The 5:30 bar rang its solemn three clangs. Chris pounded his feet over the gratings, a fuming, hunched ball of rage. When would this creepin' Judas half-speed end? Where was that *Bars?* How could he beat any ship in pea-soup fog? If he lost this race, though—He dared not contemplate it.

Suddenly the telegraphs jingled Full Speed Ahead! Chris beat his man to the port engine. He opened her wide and yelled to the hand on the starboard one. A big shudder shook the ship. She churned her way off a shoal spot, gathered momentum and flew. At last the experiment was being tried out. Pollack Rip hung against the mists astern; it was clear ahead.

And the *Bars* stood one mile out front.

The captain stormed in.

"Damn her!" he snorted. "She actually stole past us somewhere in that fog—in a narrow channel. Chief, we're busted!"

Trask took the liberty to whirl the man face to face.

"You're gonna hear a lot o' new noises aboard here. Right away, too. Hold yer head, Cap'n, ye gotta stand 'em. What this greyhound needs is better propellers. I'm gonna prove it—and catch the *Bars,* the fog-sneak!"

With that off his chest, Christopher Trask, the sardine chief who had dreamed, leaped to the long deferred peak of his hopes and dreams. He blew like magic fury upon his realm of steam. Every last fireman aboard came tumbling into the stokehold to clean fires double-quick; that for a bigger head of steam. He pumped his fresh water overside, keeping only enough to see him in; that to lighten ship. He locked down all six safety valves so she couldn't blow off at 250. Then he ran headlong up the stokehold ladder and yelled:

"Wi-ide open! Feed 'em. Fee-eed!"

OFF Highland Light she hit the new speed of nineteen knots. She crossed the mouth of Massachusetts Bay at a 19.6 clip. On the forty-third parallel of latitude she plowed abreast the slamming, pounding *Bars.* Smoke belched, blackened the sky, from two pairs of scorching, sizzling funnels. The tension

became terrific. Both ships were doing twenty knots.

But the *Bars* was at her utmost peak of performance. Her firemen had not been double-watched. Her fresh water had not been pumped out. Probably her safety valves were shut down, but clever old Chris knew that C. Clinton wouldn't foresee the stern need of the other tricks he had used in time; C. Clinton was too cocksure, too inflated.

So the *Bars's* black gang staggered under the grueling punishment. Another thing: C. Clinton lacked Chris's racing experience in sardiners; he didn't realize the importance of freshly cleaned fires in a pinch like this.

Chris chuckled. After breasting the *Bars* until he figured their whole after gang must be crazed by strain, he dived below.

Now, indeed, came his supreme bid for victory. Without a word to anybody, he opened every by-pass. Instantly new, livid horsepower swept into his cylinders. Live, crowding, battle-mad steam thrust those pistons faster than the eye could follow. They were thunderbolts packed full of force.

"Perfect!" cried Chris.

Satisfied, he chanced another look outside. It was the biggest eyeful his gray optics ever beheld. Advanced eccentric rods; double-watched stokers going tiptop yet; extra, live steam in second and third cylinders—all combined in another Trask miracle. The *Amherst* picked up her throbbing, vibrating carcass. She rattled throughout. Then, sir, she stepped! Faster, still faster, she moved ahead of the *Bars*. Her crowds roared. Hats careened over the intervening waves. The old "black sheep," as her owners had dubbed her, left her jinx behind.

Somewhere east of Isle o' Shoals, the *Bars* dwindled to a speck over the *Amherst's* stern. Not even then did the Great Eastern liner relax.

Portland Lightship lifted off the horizon—and the *Bars* lost somewhere down over the rim astern. But Captain Bunce had been asked to a conference with Chris; they decided that the time was ripe for a new record on the Portland run. Bunce left the lightship well to starboard, picked his buoys closer alongshore and bored on furiously. It was like bowling candlepins to the very entrance of the harbor.

But the *Amherst* recked not of narrow entrances; she was racing *Bars, Stars, Dartmouth,* her own past performances—everything! She was a living fury, and Chris kept her so. He shot her into Portland Harbor so fast that her bow wave boomed on the rocks. She gave the Spring Point Lighthouse a bath, snatched its workboat from its painter and sucked it along.

Up the harbor sped the Great Eastern's new pride, Chris Trask's latest, most supreme miracle. She churned at her pierhead and backed in alongside with an all-time record for the run from New York!

Eighty-seven minutes afterward, by Chris's chronometer, the Bestt Liner *Bars* limped to her berth, defeated by a far greater margin than she ever had or ever would beat anybody.

CHIEF C. CLINTON TRASK carefully hung away his new uniform and dressed in quiet gray. Somehow it seemed more fitting for what he was about to do.

He was bewildered, chagrined by defeat; he was haggard from the strain of the last twenty-four hours. His first big test—and he had lost out. His balloon of ego had burst. Yet, from somewhere deep within him, the Yankee, dependable streak was coming through, was asserting its rightful self.

The real Chris Clinton Trask was sprouting.

He couldn't go over to the *Amherst;* that was out of the question. But he had sent a porter over with a note of congratulation to the man, the somebody who had beaten him. And he had added gallantly, "If you have a

minute to spare, sir, I should like to shake the hand of the man who got all that speed out of the *Amherst*."

The other chief's reply had been prompt. Already he had complied by naming time and place for a meeting ashore.

A chastened young man, inconspicuously clad in gray worsted, went up Commercial Street to the rendezvous and waited. He wondered just whom he'd behold crossing the cobblestones with extended hand; certainly not the elderly Chief Lamont. No, no—nor that lately promoted second assistant.

Harmon must have transferred somebody from some other G.E. boat; then there was Nelson, Daggert—

His cogitations ended abruptly. Around the nearest corner stepped a thin veteran. His weary shoulders stooped. His brand new uniform coat seemed sizes too large, the sleeves too long. The regulation G.E. cap settled rather grotesquely to his ears.

But cords of gold braid gleamed in the sun on the sleeves of that ill-fitting coat; and the oversized cap bore two significant words:

"Chief Engineer."

Time, the Essence

By JAMES W. BENNETT

IN FOOCHOW is to be found China's No. 1 lacquer shop. The owner and his sons are exceedingly hard-working artists. Some of their processes are secret. The simpler features, of course, are known. In central and southern China are grown the lac trees which give forth a resinous white sap. They are tapped only at night, to avoid the curdling touch of the sun.

In a semi-fluid state the sap is borne to the lacquer makers, where it is strained through hempen cloth. Three to eighteen coats are used. Amber lacquer is so colored by adding pigs' gall; vermilion is prepared with ground cinnabar.

One day a very important buyer from America, whose firm had decided to add a stock of genuine Chinese *objets de vertu*, visited the No. 1 lacquer shop and went over its stock. Unerringly he picked out the finest pieces. Then he said quietly—

"I wish now to place an order. This one," the buyer continued, pointing to a box on whose lacquered surface had been painted a scene from the life of Confucius. "I can use two gross. And, of this smaller box, I shall want ten gross. Those vases, a thousand—"

"Wait, honorable sir," interrupted the owner, speaking through an interpreter. "How soon would you expect this order finished?"

"Oh, I'll not push you. This is now April. By October, let us say."

"But, prior born," the owner again interrupted, "if I accept this commission, do you realize how long it will take to execute it?" He smiled dimly. "At a rough estimate, three hundred years."

"*What?*" The buyer's word was a shout. "But can't you hurry up your men? Double your staff! Work nights!"

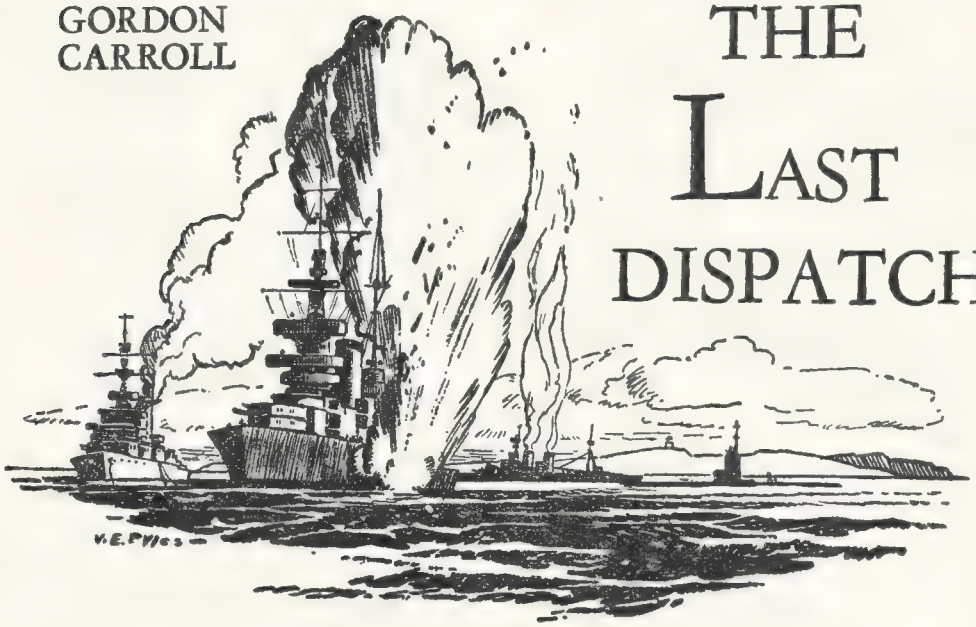
"Hire more men?" softly echoed the lacquer maker. "And have my secrets stolen? I could hire a thousand men who would be willing to work without pay—for that very purpose. No man labors for me who would not guard the ancient secrets of this house with his life. Hurry the lacquers that have borne our chop for six centuries? . . . With your permission, I shall now withdraw." And this he did.

The buyer's firm is now buying its lacquer ware from a factory in Hoboken that turns out a thousand boxes a week —a most satisfactory arrangement.

By the Author of "The Uhlan"

GORDON CARROLL

THE LAST DISPATCH



ON THE northeast coast of Scotland is the village of Herndon, almost concealed from view of the North Sea by two lofty headlands which designate the entrance to Herndon Firth. During the War Herndon Firth was one of the smaller naval bases of the British Empire. There was a patrol boat depot there, an anchorage for destroyers and light cruisers, one slipway, a small ordnance shop and the Herndon wireless station.

Usually there were Naval Intelligence officers to be found at the wireless station; but they had little to do except decode messages and occasionally become alarmed about German agents, reported operating along the Scotch coast for the benefit of marauding U-boats. On these occasions, however, the German agents invariably proved to be figments of some one's imagination, so not very much was done about them.

One afternoon in the Spring of 1918, three men stood talking on the eminence of the naval officers' golf course, high above Herndon Firth and the village that hugged its scraggy shore. One of the three men was Marlett, the visiting London correspondent. As he removed a pipe from his lips, he tossed back his head and laughed—a laugh that was at once derisive and ironic.

"Oh, hold on, Captain Cochrane!" he exclaimed to his nearest companion. "You're merely trying to enliven the monotony of rustic life in Scotland. After three years, you still don't believe all you hear about German spies?"

Captain Cochrane, stiff and immaculate in British navy blue, turned to the third member of the group before replying. The third man was Brannon, a lanky American Navy lieutenant, sent north to Scotland by the Atlantic Fleet for liaison duty. At present he was attached to the Herndon wireless station to study British signal communications.

Neither officer could have been thirty.

"Y'see, Brannon," explained the captain ruefully, "here's a choice example of what's been preached on this side of the

Atlantic ever since the War started. The belief that God's in his heaven, all's well with the world—and the Royal Navy. You can't impress it on any one, including Marlett, that German agents are smart fellows, and often do the obvious just to throw Naval Intelligence off scent. Why, I could relate—"

But the London newspaperman interrupted, his gaunt face still defiant.

"Which means, Cochrane, that because a rating on one of your patrol boats reported a mysterious blinker light along this bleak shore last night, you conclude an enemy agent is operating hereabouts? Bosh! I'll wager two to one your rating was plain drunk and saw spots before his eyes."

Marlett snapped out his last sentence, then became silent. Cochrane refused the bait, inferring that Naval Intelligence was above such sardonic argument. Only Brannon, tall, sandy haired and loose of limb, refused to be ruffled by the trend of conversation. Instead, he punched holes in the turf with his walking stick. Finally he glanced up, his gray eyes quizzical.

"Listen!" he exclaimed. "If you two fellows think I'm going to referee your bum argument, you're crazy. I don't know anything about German spies; I haven't been in Herndon long enough." He turned, smiling, to Marlett. "But I'll say this much: I never saw a newspaperman, American or British, who wasn't skeptical of everything."

Marlett shrugged his spare shoulders.

"Fair enough!" he retorted. "Yet you might add there was never an Intelligence officer, American or British, who didn't seize on every available war scare and magnify it three-fold."

Cochrane rejoined the fray.

"But see here, Marlett," he interposed defencively, "if I didn't take each spy rumor and analyze it, I might overlook valuable clews. That's a fact, and you know it!"

Marlett shifted his weight to his heels. A breeze was blowing inland from the North Sea across the golf course where the three men stood, and a sudden gust tilted Marlett's hat. He flipped down the brim impatiently.

"Perhaps I do know it," he said. Then he glanced at his wristwatch and retrieved his brown malacca stick from the crook of one arm. "But before I'm forced to confess in full, I'll stroll along to the village. I've got to dig up a feature yarn, somehow. My editor's frantic. Y'know, if the Royal Navy would only forget censorship for an hour or so, I might write some real dispatches."

His voice died on a hopeful note; he dismissed the previous argument with a curt wave of one hand. Then he turned away and walked down the sloping terrain, while the breeze whipped his gray flannel suit about his angular frame. Behind him, Cochrane and Brannon crossed the fairway and seated themselves at the base of a grass covered bunker.

VIEWED from the golf course, Herndon Firth came in from the North Sea like a gnarled finger; and on its gray surface were visible the confused silhouettes of destroyers and light cruisers. Oceanward rose the two rocky headlands, while just inside the shelter of their protecting bulk lay nondescript naval sheds and a few piers; and at one point in a small cove, experimental mines were kept moored in shallow water behind a line of red flag buoys.

The two-story brick wireless station, to which Brannon was temporarily attached, loomed to westward, its aerial towers embroidered against the sky. Between the station and the coastline were high, rolling hills, half covered by vegetation, out of which had been hewn the seven-hole golf course. Near the first tee was a rubblestone farm cottage, reclaimed to serve as an officers' clubhouse.

Cochrane doffed his cap, baring his flaxen hair to the late afternoon sun which was struggling through the clouds. He stared at the hills where Marlett had vanished, then spoke reproachfully.

"Marlett's hard to please, eh? And why? He's got a cushy berth! Spends his time traveling from one naval base to another, scribbling feature dispatches for the newspaper public back home. When he's here at Herndon he's allotted free quarters abroad a ship in harbor, and even a navy launch to cruise about in. Privileged character, I'd say! But, in spite of all that, he scoffs when you tell him a bit of news."

Brannon stretched his blue-clad legs.

"Yes," he assented, "they're all alike —reporters. What's eating this fellow is that he can't print all the stuff he hears. Too much censor! And so he's sore. Well, who wouldn't be?" he concluded tolerantly.

Cochrane nodded, half agreeing. Brannon raised his eyes to stare up the slope beyond the fairway, where a patch of woods crested the hill three hundred yards distant. Above the treetops a flock of birds, suddenly disturbed, began to wheel and circle, calling harshly. For a minute or so they fluttered in evident disorder. Then the excitement, whatever it was, subsided, and the birds returned to their leafy security. Brannon swung his gaze seaward, where two plumes of black smoke were taking shape on the horizon.

The minutes passed. Cochrane relaxed in the sun; Brannon watched the smoke plumes draw closer, until two vessels were visible beneath the rolling, sooty cloud. Soon their nature was apparent: a British light cruiser and a lone escort destroyer, coming up from the south. Brannon's stick indicated the cruiser.

"Who is she?" he asked.

Cochrane elevated himself on one elbow.

"*Durchester*—one of the old City class," he vouchsafed. "We had a wireless on her last night. Arriving from Cromarty."

Both officers arose from the grass and stood erect, facing the sea, to watch the two warships change course and prepare to enter the channel between the mined areas. Then disaster came swiftly and terribly, before either man could cry out or raise a hand in startled horror.

On the cruiser's port beam a submarine periscope broke the surface, like a knot of tangled white thread upon gray cloth. Next a pale, bubbling line moved across the sea. Then, amidships, the cruiser suddenly emitted an oily pillar of smoke, flame and escaping steam, which towered above the masts and burned reddish brown. The explosion, coming rapidly on the impact of a well aimed torpedo, staggered the *Durchester's* slender hull, twisted and tore her plates, opened a wide hole in her side until, with swift accord, her decks canted and she commenced to settle. From out of the coiling, rust-like column spiraling above her bits of débris came flying—deck fittings, coal, smashed skylights, a torrent of steaming splinters and canvas, some darker clots that whirled through the air in grotesque caricature of human bodies.

Then the blast was over, as swiftly as it had come. The deep toned reverberations boomed away into the Scotch hills; a pall of ugly vapor commenced to settle over the sinking cruiser. Beneath the pall, black spots struggled on the sea's surface like ants caught blindly in a mighty upheavel of nature.

"Submarined!"

The single word escaped Cochrane's half opened lips; temporarily he was incapable of further speech. Brannon, an arm's length away, whirled about to stare into the rigid face of his companion. A harsh, frozen second passed, as long as a year. Then up the slope of the golf course the flock of birds again deserted the treetops, croaking discordantly, wheeling in dismay, as a whistling, whining thing zoomed from the foliage and mounted high in the sky, trailing a thin white line of vapor. Up it went, higher and higher, until finally it burst and lay in the air like a splashed puffball. A signal flare, sending some inscrutable message against the sky.

Cochrane shook himself like a man recovering from a trance. Then he raised his blue eyes and swept the hills until his glance fastened on the belt of woods whence the rocket had come. But not a leaf stirred. The sun cast its pale yellow aura on the turf; the birds had settled once more. Yet the wisps of black smoke still curled in the sky; and there was Brannon standing beside him, tanned fists clenched. And, out to sea, gray haze was spreading above the *Durchester's* grave, half obscuring the escort destroyer which dashed about, terrier-like, picking up survivors.

"D'you see anything or any one?" cried Cochrane, pointing to the silent trees.

"Nothing," the American replied.

Cochrane cursed once, under his breath. His brows were furrowed, and he seemed to be torn between two impulses. Slowly he transferred his gaze to the destroyer offshore, now cutting the débris-laden surface in widening circles. Then he struck one hand against the other.

"We've got to step lively!" he cried. "Brannon, run up to those trees and see what you can find. That flare was a signal—what kind, I don't know. But it spells mischief. The fellow who fired it probably'll leave some trace. Look carefully! I'm off to the wireless station. They'll be wanting me badly there—and soon."

Cochrane turned and, half walking, half running, made his start across the turf. Once past the nearest tee he broke into a steady run. Behind him, Brannon stood rooted to the earth for a few moments.

Already, on the crowded bosom of Herndon harbor, a half dozen small craft were in motion, heading out to search for survivors of the cruiser. Brannon eyed them once, quite intently; then he too turned and, facing northward, began to ascend the hill beyond the fairway, threading his course between sponge rock and scrub gorse.

ARRIVING at the fringe of the woods, he moved stoutly ahead, fending off branches with his walking stick. The foliage overhead obscured the rays of the fading sun, creating a dull, unnatural light between the avenues of trees and underbrush, almost as if a thin fog emanated from the earth. There was no sound anywhere; only the noise of his boots crunching last year's leaves, and his breath coming rapidly from his lips. He continued to move forward, peering intently for traces of a path or a trail of trampled shrubs. Two hundred feet farther he found what he sought—a well defined pathway running east and west. He hesitated; then he turned to his right in the direction of the sea, for it was from this sector that the flare had soared.

Ten minutes passed in search before Brannon's gray eyes displayed a gleam of interest. He had now progressed eastward along the path to the spot where it debouched from the trees and straggled away over rock shoulders toward the beach. Here, at a point twenty feet within the woods, some one had veered from the path, crushing brush and bracken in his passage. Brannon followed this new trail until it ended abruptly at the fringe of the trees. He stood overlooking Herndon Head and the channel beyond, where a cluster of small vessels still hovered about the spot at which the *Durchester* had disappeared.

Brannon explored the mold covered earth underfoot. The person who had preceded him had spent considerable time at this spot, as indicated by disturbed leaves and soil. Yet, save for a muddle of footprints, there was no helpful clew. Kneeling on the earth, Brannon commenced a thorough inspection; but at the end of another ten minutes he was forced to admit his failure. He had discovered only the burnt end of a safety match and two or three smudges of tobacco ash. He arose, frowning, dusted the mold from his knees.

Next he turned and commenced slowly retracing his steps, swinging his glance from side to side. Before he again reached the pathway he halted abruptly and leaned over. In the fast fading light something gleamed pale against the earth. Swiftly he picked it up. It was a torn fragment of paper, somewhat crumpled, with handwriting on one side.

Holding it in his left hand, Brannon thumbed his cigaret lighter and read the written words by its flickering illumination. They were legible; yet in their entirety seemed to signify nothing of great import. Brannon knit his brows as he doused the lighter.

Then he shrugged, placed the scrap of paper in his pocket, resumed his stride and set foot on the pathway once more. This time he turned left and shaped his course westward down the gloomy trail between the trees, moving rapidly in the direction of the wireless station. And as he walked, he muttered to himself—short, clipped words that betrayed his New England ancestry.

Lights were twinkling on ship and shore when he descended the last hill and came within hailing distance of the wireless station. As he struck the graveled road leading to the building, some one's shadow loomed in the main doorway. Brannon drew closer, and Marlett, pipe in mouth, sauntered forth, halting when he saw the American. Then he jerked one thumb over his shoulder.

"They're all too busy in there," he confided. "You can't give me a spot of news, can you? Something about the *Durchester* that won't violate censorship?"

Brannon pondered.

"No," he said finally, "not a thing. You know just as much about it as I do, and that's not much."

"H-m-m," murmured the newspaperman. "Well, it seems I can't accomplish anything here. I think I'll move along to the piers and talk with the sailors."

Suiting the action to the words, he nodded casually to Brannon, twirled his stick several times and strode away into the semidarkness, heading for the village. As he vanished Brannon entered the building.

Cochrane was seated in the code room, immersed in a sea of messages. He did not speak as Brannon appeared, nor did the American disturb him. Instead, he crossed the room and began pacing the floor softly, alongside a row of darkened windows.

From beyond the adjoining walls came the sound of a Marconi set in operation, its spark gap whining and crackling. Two operators sat before the shining board, one with headphones jammed to his ears, sending call and counter-call, jotting incoming messages, filling pages with scribbled notes. Scapa Flow, Cromarty, Invergordon, Rosyth, Harwich—each naval base, each ship, must hear of the *Durchester's* loss. Some accepted the news in silence; others filled the ether with query.

While the minutes passed, Brannon continued his pacing, a deep frown lining his forehead. Two questions were uppermost in his mind: How had the U-boat laid its ambuscade? And who had fired that signal flare?

Finally Cochrane laid down his pencil and glanced at the wall clock. Then he wheeled about in his chair to address Brannon.

"Find anything up there on the hill?"

The American halted, one hand reaching for his jacket pocket.

"Only this," he replied, extending the scrap of paper.

But even as Cochrane reached for it, a telephone on his desk interrupted, buzzing insistently. He lifted the receiver and for a few moments conversed in monosyllables. Then he replaced the instrument and arose from his chair.

"Senior naval officer wants to see me at once," he said, moving toward the door which led through the Marconi room. "Our talk will have to wait till later. How about meeting me at Mc-

Lean's Café in the village—say at 8:30?"

"Right," said Brannon, replacing the paper in his pocket. "I'll see you there."

Then Cochrane was gone, his boots clumping down the hall.

BRANNON swung the code room door ajar, brushed pencils to one side and sat upon the top of Cochrane's desk, his legs dangling over the edge. Through the doorway he had a partial view of the Marconi cubicle. The senior operator, he noted, still wore headphones; his assistant had departed.

Ten minutes elapsed as Brannon smoked one cigaret and lighted a second. All the while, beneath the table, his legs swung idly, rhythmically. He was thinking about the *Durchester*, and other things. For one, the U-boat's attack had been well executed—almost too well. Its perfection indicated foreknowledge of ship movements; the *Durchester's* arrival at Herndon, and the Cromarty sailing schedule. This, in turn, indicated a leak somewhere in naval communications. But where? And what about that signal flare?

Brannon had just reflected that the entire problem was one for British naval jurisdiction, not his own, when the Marconi operator in the adjoining room shoved back his chair, removed his headphones and stepped into the outer hall. His shadow crossed the floor and vanished.

Suddenly Brannon's legs ceased their rhythmic swing; the pupils of his eyes contracted; every nerve in his lean body became alert. Beyond the metallic wireless board, at the sill of a half opened window, was a noise—a queer, rasping noise. It sounded like an object being dragged across the operator's desk. Brannon leaned forward, hands gripping the desk edge, and peered through the partly opened door. Then his gray eyes opened wide in stark knowledge, and he slipped silently from the desk to the floor. As he ran stealthily down the hall, heading for the building entrance, amazement was written on his features —amazement mixed with shock. Good Lord, had he seen aright?

AT 8:30, Brannon entered McLean's Café to keep his appointment with Cochrane. He nodded to the bluff Scotch proprietor in the taproom and strode rapidly to the rear. Some one called casually to him from a table along the wall, but Brannon didn't answer or deflect his glance from the narrow door ahead. He turned the knob and entered a private room. Cochrane looked up from the small table and snorted.

"Well, man, why come barging in like an angry lion?"

Brannon refused an immediate answer. Instead, he reached for a whisky glass and tilted a bottle until the amber fluid poured from it.

"Say, Cochrane," he snapped savagely, "what d'you really know about Marlett?"

The Englishman frowned.

"Marlett? Oh, quite a bit. But I hardly think we need discuss him. There are other things more important to—"

"Yes?" cried Brannon. "You're wrong. You and I are going to discuss Marlett—plenty!"

Cochrane's eyes narrowed, appraising Brannon's flushed face.

"Are we?" He shrugged. "All right, let's have it. I see you're bursting."

"Damned funny, I think," Brannon began, almost absently.

Cochrane set down his drink and the tinkle of the glass filled the small room.

Brannon continued:

"Yes, damned queer. I was sitting in the code room after you left, smoking a cigaret and thinking over a few things. All of a sudden the Marconi man stepped out into the hall to get something or other. A moment after he vanished I heard a noise at the window beyond the instrument board.

"I looked through the doorway. At first I didn't see anything except the

half open window and the iron bars outside. Then a man's hand, holding a brown malacca stick, came through the bars. There was a bit of pointed metal on the end of the stick—a nail or something similar. The malacca weaved around, here and there, and then dropped down to spike some decoded messages from the desk. Remember, all I could glimpse beyond the window sill was a man's hand and part of his coat sleeve—a grayish material.

"I slipped from the code room and made for the hall, but the fellow must have seen me, for I heard his stick clatter on the sill and some other noise, like cloth ripping. By the time I got around to the outside of the building, the bird had flown. No light beyond that window. Dark as pitch!"

Cochrane nodded.

"So I went back to the Marconi room, got a flash lamp, came out again and looked about the window. I found this, hanging on an insulator nail."

Brannon extracted a small triangle of gray flannel from his pocket and tossed it to the table. Cochrane examined the fragment in silence.

"That explains the ripping noise," Brannon went on. "When the fellow ducked he caught his coat on a nail and left a calling card. . . . Now, d'you remember what kind of a suit Marlett was wearing today? And what kind of a stick he carried?"

Cochrane had suddenly become very grave.

"Yes," he replied slowly. "Gray flannel suit; brown malacca stick."

"Right!" Brannon agreed. "But wait a minute!" Again he reached in his pocket and this time produced the ragged bit of paper he had discovered among the trees. "Found that up on the hill this afternoon. Take a good look at it."

Cochrane held the torn scrap in his palm. One side it bore fragments of handwriting—a vertical, feminine hand, written with a stub pen. Seven words were legible:

. . . bill . . .
. . . two hundred pounds . . .
. . . paid now . . .
. . . consequences. . .

While Cochrane studied the writing, Brannon found a pencil and an old envelop in his jacket. He scribbled industriously for a few moments, then flipped the envelop across the table. Cochrane read:

. . . bill
of two hundred pounds
must be paid now or you
take the consequences.

"There!" Brannon exclaimed. "Get it? A letter from a woman, demanding money. Now suppose we look at things this way: Marlett left London recently for a visit to the East Coast naval bases. He received this letter when he arrived in Herndon some days ago. He must procure the money; but for what exact purpose we don't know. Hard pushed, desperate, he gets in communication with the other side—some German agent hereabouts—and offers to sell information.

"Being a privileged character in Herndon, he has ways of learning things—such as poking his stick through the window of a wireless room! Last night he spiked that message from Cromarty concerning the *Durchester*. Next he got busy with a blinker light along the shore and passed the word to a lurking U-boat, rendezvous arranged in advance, no doubt. Then this afternoon—*whang!* The British navy loses a cruiser."

"Dramatic, I'll confess," replied Cochrane slowly, "but hardly plausible." He fingered his whisky glass. "You can't accuse a man of Marlett's standing merely because he happens to carry a brown malacca stick and wear a gray flannel suit. And what about that flare, fired from the hill?"

The American hesitated.

"That's something else," he admitted. "But let's proceed thusly: Marlett is in a tough spot. Once you start a game like this, you can't halt at any-

thing. So this afternoon after the *Durchester* went up, he immediately fired a prearranged signal to let his German friends know he was still on the job in Herndon. Reckless means of communication, of course, but no more dangerous than sending a written message. And it was sure to succeed if he made a quick getaway from the woods —which he did.

"If you'll remember, Marlett only *said* he was going to the village when he left us on the golf course. I figure he made a circuit around the hills and concealed himself in the trees. Temptation was too strong; he wanted to see if his information brought results—off Herndon Head. Then, after firing the flare, he struck out for safer parts; and, as he ran, he somehow dropped this piece of letter paper."

Cochrane relinquished his glass and commenced to talk, half to himself. As he spoke, he enumerated his arguments on the tips of his fingers.

"Now, wait a bit! Let's estimate the man you accuse: One; Marlett has been at this news writing game since '14. Two; he has never violated an official confidence. Three; he gives newspaper readers a pleasant insight into British navy life. Four; on account of this helpful propaganda, he stands quite close with the Admiralty. Five; there's a spy rumor in Herndon at present: that blinker light reported on the shore. Six; I think you've succumbed to it, which—"

The American interrupted with a wry grimace.

"And seven; you think I'm a damned fool! Maybe so; but if Marlett is innocent, whose malacca stick was thrust into the Marconi room?"

Cochrane's face sobered again.

"Oh, it sounds incriminating, Brannon, but I can hardly credit it. Marlett selling out? Preposterous!" He drummed his fingers on the table. "However, your information must be considered, despite my own views. S'pose we jog along to the station and have a look around. In any event, I think I'll post an extra guard."

BRANNON, finishing his drink, grunted assent. The two men arose. Cochrane opened the door and stepped out into the taproom. Brannon pulled on his cap and followed, the last swallow of whisky warming the pit of his stomach. They walked the length of the room, knifing a haze of tobacco smoke, and passed through the entrance. Just outside, Brannon halted to light a cigaret. He twirled his lighter, blew a stream of smoke from his nostrils and glanced up—into the face of Marlett.

The newspaperman was standing on the pavement, his long, lean face gleaming pale beneath his hat brim. He now wore a light topcoat, and the familiar malacca stick was missing from the crook of his arm. It was obvious he had been about to enter the café when the two outcoming men blocked his progress. Brannon stopped in his tracks, his muscles tense; while, behind Marlett, Cochrane too was motionless.

"Hullo!" said Marlett.

"Hullo," retorted Brannon, forcing a smile. "Going inside?"

"Yes."

"You had a pretty busy day, eh? *Durchester* torpedoed, and all that."

"Yes, I did," Marlett admitted. "But I was able to wire a little stuff without violating the S. N. O's censorship." He reached in his overcoat and extracted a large envelop, white and bold in the night. "Dug up a feature yarn, too. Sending it off in tonight's post."

"Uh-huh."

Brannon ruminated. He was becoming conscious of a dull anger within. Something about Marlett rubbed him the wrong way, caused a little ripple to run up his spine. Of a sudden, the anger flamed into an overpowering urge —an urge composed of irritation and impatience, stirred by his last drink of whisky. It seized him, and propelled him across the borderline of caution,

despite his earlier resolution to remain calm. He found himself saying—

"Y'know, I thought I saw you awhile ago."

"So you did," replied Marlett agreeably. "Up at the wireless station about seven o'clock."

"No, I don't mean then. I mean about *eight* o'clock."

Marlett's head came up slowly until the gleam from the café window glistened in his eyes. His stare was steady as a rock and slightly amused.

"At 8:00, you say? I don't follow you. I've been at the village inn since 7:30, writing this story." He held the envelop aloft once more.

"Well, maybe I was wrong," Brannon replied more soberly. "I thought I saw you."

"Impossible," Marlett responded.

He turned down his coat collar and stepped sidewise as if to pass Brannon. The American gave him passage room and then moved ahead to where Cochrane waited at the curb, hand outstretched and a frown on his face. Marlett vanished inside the café. The two navy men walked half a block before Cochrane relinquished his iron grasp on the American's arm.

"I say, Brannon," he protested, "what's your scheme? If Marlett is guilty of your charges, surely you've aroused his suspicions. Why play into the chap's hands?"

Brannon almost smiled.

"Scheme, Cochrane? None! None at all. But I've just realized you—that is, you Britishers—won't touch Marlett until he's caught flat-footed at this business, and I don't think he'll be careless any more, after tonight. In the meantime, I'm going to trail along after him, sort of unofficially, in the hope of keeping him out of further mischief. What's more, I'll bet you a bottle of Scotch to a package of cigarets that I get something on him before the week's out—something more incriminating than a brown malacca stick and a gray flannel suit. How's that?"

Cochrane solemnly contemplated the misty confines of Nestle Street and the sputtering gas lamps. Then he pulled his white scarf about his chin.

"I think you're wrong about Marlett," he said evenly. "Whole thing's too fanciful. However, I'm going to take the necessary precautions. And as for your wager—well, I'll take that, too."

Without further words both men, each wrapped in his own thoughts, strode ahead into the hazy night, moving toward the hills above the village which encompassed the wireless station.

THE following afternoon Brannon again found himself seated in Cochrane's office, this time ensconced in a chair with his feet resting upon the desk. Cochrane was absent, having received another peremptory call from the S. N. O.

At the moment Brannon was idly contemplating the smoke from his cigaret. The day, for him, had been singularly unproductive. Marlett, he had ascertained, had spent the morning aboard his ship, the *Howe*, anchored in harbor. Coming ashore for lunch, the correspondent had repaired to the village tavern, where he was reported engaged with his portable typewriter. So far, his activities were quite harmless, his conduct quite exemplary and disappointing.

Brannon dropped his feet to the floor and glanced at the clock. Ten minutes to five. In lieu of anything better, he suddenly decided to play around the golf course alone. Taking a pencil from the desk rack, he scribbled a note and stuck it in the blotter. The note merely invited Cochrane to dinner at McLean's Café at 7:30. Brannon arose, donned his cap and departed for his quarters, there to procure a golf bag.

As he went swinging over the slopes toward the golf course, Brannon's eyes grew somber. The rocky hills, the heather clad earth, the cloud flecked sky—all were the same as on the pre-

vious day; yet too, they seemed different. There was nothing substantial on which to place his fingers; rather the change was intangible, unreal, almost as if a shadow of foreboding darkened his vision.

The feeling grew upon him, vague but insistent, until he reached the spot where the pathway branched; the right fork leading to the clubhouse, the left, which he had traversed the previous afternoon, toward the woods. Here Brannon halted for five minutes, irresolute, pondering, staring about him. Then suddenly he swung his golf bag from his shoulders and concealed it beneath a nearby clump of gorse. As he arose, his mind made up, he veered to the left, choosing the path which led to the woods. It had occurred to him that a second search among the tree covered hills might be more productive of interest than a solitary round of golf.

However, he was destined to disappointment. For a full hour he tramped the pathways, eyes alert for any indication of human activity or any untoward sign. He roamed as far as the scraggy cliffs overlooking the sea; crisscrossed the heather carpeted slopes; pushed his way through the brush to the spot where he had found the crumpled fragment of letter paper. But he remained empty-handed. His efforts merely convinced him that if Marlett—or any German agent—was operating in this wooded section, his tracks were well covered.

When he finally abandoned his hunt, an angry sunset was dying in crimson streaks across the sky. He returned to the pathway and walked with head down, hands rammed deep in his pockets, his brain occupied with certain projects. He decided he must watch Marlett tonight. If any rendezvous was planned upon the rocky shore, he wanted to be present. And, with Cochrane's help, it might be managed.

Thus Brannon conversed with himself until he reached a curve in the path from which he could view the fork in the trail below where he had concealed his golf bag.

He commenced the long, winding descent, then suddenly slowed, his nostrils crinkling. He smelled a whiff of tobacco smoke. But it was gone as swiftly as it had come. He peered about, saw or heard nothing. He concluded that his nose had played him false and moved forward again, preparing to pass between two thickets which almost arched above the path. He entered their shadow, striding smoothly, head lowered.

Came the crackle of a breaking twig on his left and a swift tremor in his muscles responded. Involuntarily he turned in the direction of the noise, then tried as swiftly to halt the motion. The shadow of foreboding returned in a flash, searing his brain, but too late.

He had one glimpse of Marlett's lean, saturnine face peering through the leaves; he heard a whistling sound in the air. Then a heavy ash stick, clutched in Marlett's hand, struck him a staggering blow on the head, knocked his cap to the ground and induced a buckling sensation in his knees. The world whirled about him.

Half dazed, Brannon tried to hold himself erect and draw his clenched fists upward. Then again the stick descended, hard and true, and took him across the forehead. He had one last vision of Marlett's face, long and gaunt, staring at him. There was neither hate, anger nor pleasure written there; instead, the man's features were composed and graven as stone. Then a black wave engulfed Brannon and he fell. Before his shoulders struck the earth he had lost all consciousness.

WHEN life commenced to flitter back to Brannon's brain, it arrived with tantalizing slowness. A great booming noise echoed in his skull and, on the outer side, scores of tiny hammers beat a metallic chorus. With a tremendous effort of will he shook his head, and a surge of blood tingled through his whole system, bringing new energy. Another

minute, and he struggled to a sitting position. Then, of a sudden, his head cleared. He stared about.

He was still near the spot where he had fallen, he decided. Solid earth lay beneath him, and the palms of his hands, resting on either side, touched damp leaves. Overhead were interlaced branches; beyond them an inky sky, without the glimmer of a star. He rubbed a clot of dried blood from his forehead, then stared at his wrist where a radiant watch dial glowed. Eight o'clock. He had lain here two hours! He arose gingerly and stretched, and the exertion caused the veins in his temples to throb painfully.

As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he discerned a faint break in the gloom ahead. He moved haltingly in that direction and found himself on the pathway, close to the fringe of the woods. Marlett apparently had dragged him into the brush some twenty feet, then dropped him, safe from discovery by a passerby.

Brannon faced left, staring into the night to get his bearings. Below him, far away, glowed pinpoints of light. That would be Herndon. Then farther around to the left, on the other side of the trees, must be the golfers' clubhouse. And at the clubhouse, a telephone. . .

Breathing heavily, Brannon ran to the fork in the pathway, turned, and then almost doubled back on his tracks as he plunged through the gloom toward the weathered stone cottage.

A sleepy steward sprang to life as Brannon strode through the clubhouse doorway. On the wall a single light burned, and the steward's eyes opened wide at the vision confronting him: an officer, bloody, bare headed, his jacket smudged with earth.

"W-w-wot's the trouble, sor?" the man stuttered.

"Where's the telephone?" Brannon barked.

The steward pointed nervously. Brannon pounded across the room, snatched the receiver and twisted the bell handle. He called McLean's Café. It seemed an interminable time before Cochrane got on the wire.

"Never mind the questions!" snapped Brannon. "I'm up at the clubhouse. Got a gash on my forehead and a lump on my skull. I feel like merry hell. But—"

"W-w-what's all that?"

"No time to explain. Have you seen Marlett about?"

"Yes. But—"

"Where and when did you see him?"

"On Nestle Street, heading for the piers. Half an hour ago."

"Then meet me at the Nestle Street landing stage in twenty minutes. Got it?"

"Yes. But—"

"See you there. G'by!"

Brannon banged the receiver down. The diminutive steward was hovering at his elbow, flustered and solicitous. Brannon stared at him owlishly.

"Bring me a wet towel!"

"Yes, sor." The steward vanished into the pantry and reappeared with a towel. Brannon commenced to mop his head with the damp cloth and continued to do so as he backed through the entrance. Then he slammed the door in the face of the surprised steward and set out down the hill. As the cool air struck his brow he broke into a lope.

Fifteen minutes later Brannon was clattering along Nestle Street, approaching the piers. He was completely out of breath, yet the run had stirred his blood into full circulation once more. He tossed the stained towel into a gutter and trotted toward the landing stage. There, beneath a lamp, Cochrane stood, expectant and wide eyed. One glance at Brannon confirmed his worst fears.

"Jove, you're a pretty sight!" he cried. "What happened?"

As rapidly as possible, Brannon related the afternoon's events. When he told how Marlett's stick had felled him, Cochrane emitted a low whistle.

"I say!" he ejaculated. "That sounds like the real thing."

"Is it real?" challenged Brannon. "You should feel my head!"

Fifty feet away a group of British ratings at the pier end began to observe the two officers with some interest. Cochrane was gesticulating, Brannon nodding. Then the latter interrupted:

"But that's not the point. Marlett's up to some new devilment. Otherwise he couldn't take the chance. I've got a hunch he's heading for—"

Another British seaman came running down the narrow street. He halted when he sighted the two officers and saluted smartly.

"Beg pardon, sors, but has either of you gentlemen seen Mr. Marlett?"

Brannon growled under his breath, but Cochrane spoke up promptly.

"No. Why?"

"Well, sor, he started out to the *Howe*. Then he come back, sent me up the street on an errand and said he'd wait here. But I looked everywhere and he ain't abaht."

Brannon cursed.

"You left him here with his launch?"

"Yes, sor."

"Ha!" Brannon confronted Cochrane. "Get that? Left him here with his boat."

He ran past Cochrane and approached the seamen on the pier.

"Any of you seen Mr. Marlett?"

One burly sailor stepped forth.

"Yes, sor. He left in his boat abaht twenty minutes ago. All alone, he was. We offered him a hand, sor, but he wouldn't have none of it."

"Which way did he go?"

"Straight out, sor, then east, like he was going to his ship." The sailor pointed offshore, indicating the location of the anchored *Howe*.

Brannon spun about.

"Come on, Cochrane!" he barked. "We're off!"

Cochrane, his face somewhat blank, came at a trot with Marlett's seaman trailing him. Brannon jumped into an empty motor tender moored to the stage and cast off the lines. Cochrane hurdled the bulwark. Marlett's follower touched his ribboned cap in a bewildered fashion, but Brannon cut him short.

"Never mind. We don't need you."

"But, sor—"

The sailor's words were lost as Brannon threw the engine over.

THE cylinders roared with power, and the small boat reversed with a sharp swish below her counter. In another moment Brannon had opened the fuel, spun the wheel, and the craft was sheering off, her bow throwing a silvery wave. Cochrane moved forward and joined Brannon at the wheel.

"I'm following you, m'fellow, in body if not in spirit. What's up?"

Brannon pushed back his tousled hair and drew a deep breath. Damn, that head still ached!

"Don't know. But if Marlett isn't aboard his Majesty's ship *Howe*, you and I are going to do a little hunting."

"Hunting?"

"That's it. Hunting! Marlett figured I was on to his game—gave me credit for knowing too much, maybe. But he had some plan cooked for tonight and was afraid I'd interfere. So what's simpler than to rap me on the head and put me out of the way for a few hours? He gets his job done and by the time I'm back in this life once more, Marlett has vanished—vanished for good. See?"

"Partly. But what is this job?"

"That, Cochrane, is the big question. But as Marlett skipped in his boat, alone, I'll make a pretty good guess. He's carrying information to—sounds funny, doesn't it? To an enemy agent."

"Oh, I say, Brannon, that's laying it on a bit thick! If you believe this, why not notify the S. N. O? He'll take the necessary steps and—"

Brannon laughed into the wind that streamed over the tiny cabin, full on his flushed face.

"Oh, hell, no! You English don't

accomplish anything that way. While every one is hemming and hawing, Marlett will pull his hook. Besides, I'm the fellow that holds the grudge. I'm the one to grab him. Look!" He pointed to the gash on his forehead.

Cochrane looked; and he held his tongue. With a skilful turn of the wheel, Brannon came up under the *Howe's* side. At the top of the ladder, silhouetted by electric bulbs, stood a marine sentry. Brannon called:

"On deck, there! Mr. Marlett aboard?"

"No, sor. He come aboard once, then went off in his boat. Ten minutes back, sor."

"Was he alone?"

"Yes, sor."

Brannon waved one hand, and the launch sheered away from the ladder, her misty exhaust pluming upward. Her bow swung eastward toward the distant entrance to Herndon Firth, where occasional lights were reflected in the sullen water. In between were the dark shadows of anchored ships. Cochrane, shaking his head in doubt, moved farther aft to hover over the motor.

"It all seems downright odd to me," he shouted at Brannon. "However, if you're looking for trouble, I s'pose I must follow along."

At this declaration, a fleeting smile passed over Brannon's face although he failed to reply. Instead, his jaws set tight and his hands clung firmly to the wheel. His thoughts were crystallizing in the moist chill of the night; he reduced the equation to its simplest terms: Marlett was ahead, somewhere, in his boat, destination unknown. And Brannon, blood pounding through the aching lump at the top of his skull, wanted an accounting.

Five minutes passed to accompaniment of the throbbing motor. Then ahead, from the bosom of the Firth, a destroyer's searchlight seared the night like a silver pencil and hung close to the surface. Brannon stood on tiptoe, staring into the gloom.

He called over one shoulder:

"There he is, Cochrane! Take a look!"

The searchlight wavered momentarily, then clung to an object which had darted out on to the Firth's surface from the southern shore, as if it had been lurking there. The silvery beam etched the target in mixed light and shadow. It was a small boat, moving rapidly, throwing an occasional burst of spray. Even at a distance the large white flag at her bow was visible. Then the searchlight blinked out; the British destroyer was satisfied. Marlett's boat was a privileged craft; the white flag, denoting the correspondent's identity, allowed her to pass at will.

"Let's coax that motor!" Brannon cried.

Cochrane did his best, adding a few revolutions to the propeller. Now they were slapping across the water at fifteen knots, reducing the gap between pursued and pursuer as each second passed. Brannon estimated they would be within hailing distance before Herndon Head loomed to starboard.

AS ANOTHER mile swept by, Brannon, straining his eyes at the darkness, glimpsed Marlett's white stern wash. He called Cochrane to take the wheel, himself moving behind the cabin where he could reach the small light carried above the spray screen. He pushed the switch. The beam flicked out into the night, danced across the waves and picked up the wake of the boat ahead. Brannon elevated the ray and flooded the craft with brilliance until her silhouette stood revealed.

Bow high, Marlett's launch was doing well, as a streaming exhaust testified. Her displacement wave curled outward on either beam and rippled across the cold gray waters. Marlett was huddled behind the wheel and, as the searchlight transfixed him, he turned, his face gleaming white as chalk. His features were undistinguishable in detail; but

the position of his body and his startled movement betrayed fear.

Brannon cupped one hand to his mouth and bellowed a hail that resounded across the surface. Then it died away. But Marlett, heedless of the call, only ducked below the bulwark. Suddenly he reappeared and crawled aft past the motor to stare astern above the churning wake. Marlett had evidently lashed the wheel, for the craft held roughly to her course, due east, past Herndon Head.

"Look out, Cochrane!" Brannon cried from the cabin hatchway. "The fellow's got a gun."

As he spoke a rifle flamed in Marlett's hands, a tiny streak of orange against the exhaust vapor of the boat. Then it flamed again and again—four times in all. Brannon swore furiously.

"Are you hit?" Cochrane called in alarm.

The American snorted derisively.

"Hell, no! But one of those bullets smacked the cabin. I heard it."

Brannon relinquished his grasp on the light handle; the beam yawed and knifed toward the heavens. Next he was fumbling about in the tiny cabin amid a litter of war gear; then he popped back on deck, a Lee-Enfield rifle in his hands. Cochrane stared at the weapon, then ahead into the night where, with the diverging searchlight, only gloom showed again. Brannon crawled to the cabin top and steadied his elbow on the hand rail. He shouted over one shoulder—

"The light!"

Cochrane hesitated.

"You're not shooting at him?"

"And why not? He's a civilian firing on naval officers. That's an offence—and I don't mean maybe! Swing that light!"

Cochrane placed one foot through the wheel to serve for steerage and, extending his right arm, grasped the pistol-like handle of the searchlight. He deflected the beam until it again revealed the craft ahead. Already the distance between the two boats was reduced to two hundred yards.

Marlett had dropped his rifle and returned to the wheel, huddling there like a shadow against the lighter background of the cabin. Brannon breathed deeply and pressed his elbow against the rail. The prong sight of the Enfield slowly lowered until it enclosed Marlett's figure. Now! He pressed the trigger.

The rifle spat once, twice, three times; the tang of burned powder stung Cochrane's nostrils. But Marlett still clung to the wheel; only once did he turn—at the first crack of Brannon's rifle—and his face looked ghostly beneath the brim of his hat. Cochrane felt an unexplained surge of pity for the fellow, who stared at his pursuers like a doomed man. Then he faced forward again, spun the wheel, and his craft turned in a half circle to port, heading northward across the Firth where the water shallowed sharply inshore. Brannon's rifle swung with the movement of the boat.

Cochrane felt words wrung from his lips:

"I say, Brannon, let's give the fellow a chance and—"

But before he could complete the sentence the rifle had flamed again beneath Brannon's finger. Marlett's black silhouette gave a convulsive shudder; the man's shoulders sagged and his body slumped to the right, vanishing below the bulwark. Somehow, in falling, Marlett retarded the throttle. His boat, deprived of rudder and power, yawed in a wide swing and almost headed back at her pursuer. The failing exhaust spired upward in white mist. Brannon crawled from the cabin and stared solemnly at his companion.

"Well, I did it," he muttered.

Then he dropped to the gratings and stood near Cochrane as he warped the launch alongside Marlett's craft. Already, behind Herndon Head, strong lights were reflected on the surface as a patrol vessel prepared to cross the Firth to investigate. Brannon eyed the

new activity until, with a swift flip of his hand, he doused the searchlight. Darkness descended. The boats bumped together softly, and Cochrane cut the motor.

BRANNON was first over the bulwarks, holding in his hand a pocket flash procured from the cabin. The yellow beam played across the deck of the other craft and came to a halt on Marlett's pale face. The man was still alive; but his breath came in snatches, and his dark eyes, wide with pain, contemplated a far off spot in the heavens. With an effort he transferred his gaze to Brannon.

"You ruddy well win," he said in a tired voice.

Brannon swallowed. Somehow, the thrill of victory was absent. Staring upward from the planking, Marlett seemed a wounded animal, neither expecting mercy nor asking it. The strength of his eyes was undiminished.

"Do me a favor, will you?" he gasped.

Brannon pushed the light into Cochrane's hand and knelt beside the wounded man. Whatever his guilt, Marlett was playing the game. Damn it, the man's face was drawn with pain.

"Take these," Marlett continued, fumbling in his coat, where already a dark stain was soaking the cloth.

Brannon pulled the coat open and reached into an inner pocket. He withdrew an oilskin packet, containing closely packed sheets of paper. He held the bundle gingerly.

"Would you—could you—drop them overside?" Marlett asked.

Brannon hesitated.

"Oh, I'll tell you what they are," Marlett raced on, fighting against time. "They contain information for the enemy. But you knew that, didn't you?"

Brannon nodded silently. Above him, Cochrane stood motionless in the dark.

"It was you who gave the U-boat a tip on the *Durchester*?" The American demanded.

"Yes."

"Why did you sell out to the enemy?" he grated.

"Because," Marlett began, attempting a wan smile, "a German agent offered me the money. I had to have it. Family, y'know, in need—My family. Child—little girl—desperately ill. You'll drop that packet of papers, won't you? No good to any one but me, now. My last dispatch! You'll—drop—them—won't—"

Cochrane suddenly leaned over the twitching man.

"Who is this German agent? Where does he—"

But the question came too late, for Marlett gave a shudder and the breath ripped out of his body. Brannon arose slowly, the packet held in one hand, away from his side, as if it contained something contaminating. He stared intently into Cochrane's blue eyes, voicing a silent question; and at once both men had the same thoughts—thoughts that arrived suddenly to furrow their tanned brows.

In official hands, this whole affair would be aired. There would be hearings and counter hearings, and a long list of black charges. But, above all, there loomed the shock to a believing public. Marlett, the news correspondent, a traitor? Killed with the evidence in his hands? Whom, then, could one trust?

Brannon clenched his hands and, as he did so, Cochrane glanced down at Marlett's body, then at the cold water overside. He nodded quickly, as if there had never been any indecision.

Brannon moved to the bulwark and put several gun cartridges into the packet. There was a soft splash, and the glistening oilskin disappeared. Brannon rubbed his hand on his trousers, like one who had touched a snake, and swung around to confront Cochrane. Already, across the Firth, came the sound of a patrol boat in full swing.

"Now what?" he snapped, in question and demand.

Cochrane tugged at his braided cap.

"Y'know, Brannon, he could have killed you today, up there in the woods."

"I know."

"Well, what d'you say we play the game through—with him?"

"How?"

Cochrane gestured off the port beam where, between boat and shore, stretched a thin line of red flag buoys. Although the markers were invisible in the darkness behind them, both men knew that a score of bulbous metal monsters floated in the shallow water of a cove. Experimental mines, loaded with explosive, moored close to shore for safety's sake.

Brannon pondered Cochrane's gesture until the light of comprehension glowed in his eyes. Then he was galvanized.

"You mean—"

"Yes," said Cochrane soberly. "One big explosion, and it is all over."

Brannon's hand reached out and grasped the Englishman's shoulder.

"Good old sailor," he muttered. "You're right."

He sprang into action. With a leap he was beside the motor of Marlett's craft. A flip of the hand, and it began to whir on a low note. The fender rail scraped the other boat in mild protest. Cochrane turned the wheel until the throw of the propeller headed the craft inshore. Then he tore the white silk scarf from about his neck and lashed the wheel.

"Ready?" he barked at Brannon.

Brannon arose from beside the motor.

"Set!" he cried. "Let her go!"

Cochrane pulled the fuel quadrant as both men sprang to the deck of their own craft. With a surge of power, the abandoned boat moved forward, propeller stirring the water into a white froth. Thirty seconds later the gray launch was some distance ahead, droning under her own power for the shallows inshore while, a mile astern, the lights of the approaching patrol vessel winked through the night, red, green and white. Cochrane stared into the darkness, following with his eyes the wake of the vanishing boat.

A MINUTE passed in silence, unbroken save for the diminishing exhaust of the pilotless craft. The two men stood grimly, lips set, cheek muscles taut.

"You don't think—" Cochrane began nervously.

But as his lips moved there was a dull roar in the night. Across the black expanse to port was painted a sullen explosion, which rose into the gloom, towered fantastically, then subsided. The muffled detonation rolled across the Firth like a peal of Summer thunder. Then silence.

Brannon exhaled gustily, as if a burden had been lifted from his soul. Cochrane cleared his throat.

"I believe," the Englishman said evenly, "that we have done the right thing—for a great number of people."

"Right," Brannon agreed solemnly.

He knelt quickly on the gratings and, scooping up four empty rifle shells, tossed them overboard. They sank with a soft gurgle. He replaced the rifle in the tiny cabin. Then he returned to the deck with a new light in his eyes.

"There's just one more thing," he said swiftly.

"What is that?" Cochrane responded.

"The story of how Marlett died."

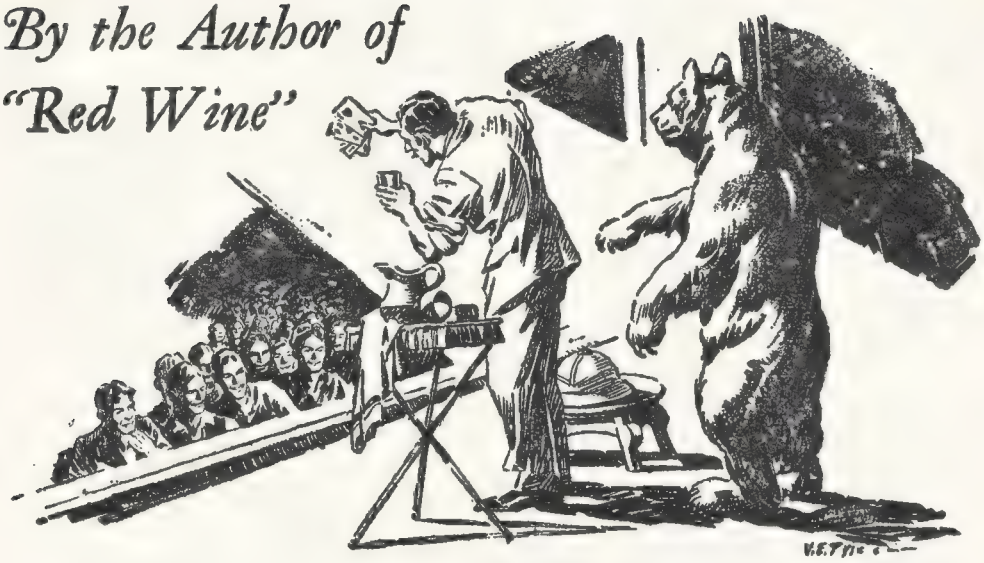
"Yes?" Cochrane said blankly. "What story?"

Brannon smiled.

"Why, the story of how three fellows got drunk in Herndon tonight and staged a boat race along the Firth. And of how one boat lost its way, crossed the red buoys and sank. C'mon, Cochrane, for heaven's sake act like you're tight!"

As the two men set their faces in vacuous, alcoholic lines, a hail from the patrol boat came across the water.

By the Author of "Red Wine"



OUT OF THIN AIR

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

THE *Gracie D.* sidled up to the dock, her rusty plates gleaming dull red through the morning mists, to bring to Port Dillingworth a cargo of tinned Australian butter, tinned Australian beef, one gross cases of Scotch whisky, and Walter Merlin.

The shipment of Scotch was nine-twelfths of a case short—a shortage detected by the first mate at the very moment he discovered the comatose Merlin and nine empty bottles. Being an intensely practical man, the first mate—a bony person with beady eyes shining under bushy eyebrows, and with a close cropped, pointed brown beard which gave to his round head an appearance not unlike that of a ripe husked coconut—started going through Merlin's pockets. This procedure revived the stowaway to a brief, hopeless protest which was ended by the impact of the mate's fist against his jaw.

Continuing his search, the mate found a greasy pack of cards, an old newspaper clipping, a gold watch, but no money. Transferring the watch to his own pocket, the mate had Merlin hauled out of the hold by four Tamil dock coolies, who forthwith dumped him on the pier. There he lay, face down, like a bundle of very dirty linen.

The sun had burned free from the opalescent haze and was striking white-hot sparks from the emerald surface of the Straits before two Malay constables sauntered leisurely along the dock toward the tittering crowd of curious Orientals gathered about the inert European.

At almost the same moment a young Malay in a bright red *sarong*, with a black velvet pillbox cap set at a jaunty angle, pushed through the crowd. He reached the white man in time to bowl over the two native constables. Then

he slung Merlin across his stalwart shoulders, knocked down a Tamil and two Chinese as he fought his way to a clear field, and started running down the pier.

Despite the burden of a man larger than himself, the Malay outdistanced his shouting pursuers, cut through the back streets of Port Dillingworth, ran along the bank of the tropical river that emptied into the Straits at this point, and gently deposited his unconscious load in a dugout canoe moored in a tangle of mangroves. To top off his morning exercise, he paddled five miles upstream, moored again, carried Merlin up a bamboo ladder into a nipa-palm hut built on stilts and stretched him on a rush sleeping-mat.

THE midafternoon heat was at its drowsiest before Merlin opened one bloodshot eye. When he saw the Malay sitting beside him, he raised himself abruptly on one elbow. The Malay was clad only in his red *sarong,* and his trim, muscular torso shone faintly with perspiration. He was smoking a cigaret through a long bamboo holder.

"Howdy!" said the Malay. "How's the old head?"

Merlin opened the other eye.

"Where am I?" he inquired.

"About five miles from Port Dillingworth," said the Malay.

"Port Dillingworth—A u s t r a l i a?" Merlin essayed a puzzled frown which was a failure because the skin across his forehead was too painfully taut.

"Not by a couple of thousand miles," said the Malay. "You're on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. We used to call the dump Kuala Sungei-bharu. But when the limeys built the deep-water docks, they named it after Dillingworth, who got himself massacred by some of my ancestors whom he was trying to civilize."

Merlin started to shake his head, but he felt something rattle inside.

"No," he said, "you're not real. You're the figment of my disordered imagination. Otherwise, why should a person with the unmistakable features and dress of Malaysia speak to me with the unmistakable, if somewhat nasal, accents of our American cousins?"

The Malay grinned.

"I learned English in Omaha and San Francisco and Brooklyn—places like that," he said. "I was in the States for four or seven years, I ain't sure which. Time never did mean much to me."

"But you came back to Port Shillingsworth," said Merlin.

"Dillingworth," corrected the Malay. "Yeah, I guess it was too much civilization for me. I went over as a sort of dry nurse to a load of tigers some zoo ordered. I was just a kid; but I had a way with cats, having been raised with 'em, you might say. So I stayed on, sort of as a handy man for circuses and animal shows. I got so I could wear shoes and chew gum. I liked the tabloids. But it was prohibition gin that civilized the daylights out of me."

Merlin groaned sympathetically.

"Out here in the jungle I'm a good Mohammedan," said the Malay, "as far as what the Koran says about not drinking hard liquor. But there ain't many mosques around Brooklyn; and anyhow I guess that prohibition gin was a little too much for me. About three drinks, and I'd go native. Like as not I'd grab a butcher knife, thinking it was a kris, and chase a Chinese laundryman down Nostrand Avenue, hollering the *sorak,* which is the Malay college yell, you might say.

"One night I had four drinks. I shinnied up a street light pole and threw down the electric bulbs, thinking they was coconuts. The bulbs popped on the sidewalk in front of a couple of cops. And even if there hadn't been any cops, I'd about figured the Prophet was right. Allah didn't mean alcohol for a brown man's stomach."

"A white man's either," amended Merlin, whose head at that moment seemed to be of the size, shape and gen-

eral feel of an association football during a brisk exchange in a championship soccer game. "I'll never take another drink as long as I live. I take you as witness, Mr. — I don't believe I got your name?"

"Ali Hammed," said the Malay. "They used to call me Al in the States. What's your monicker?"

"Walter Merlin. The name may be vaguely familiar to you—Merlin the Wizard? The Magician with the Punch? I never cared much for the under-line, but my press agent devised it for my first American tour."

"How come you got took so drunk, Mr. Merlin?" asked Ali Hammed. "Prohibition, too?"

"Ah, no," Merlin said sadly. "Something far more subtle. It was all a matter of balance—a delicate balance which I find it increasingly difficult to maintain. As you have doubtless perceived, my dear Hammed Ali—"

"Call me Al," interposed the Malay.

"As you have doubtless pereeived, my dear Al, I am fundamentally a man of some refinement. I will not bore you by reciting the list of my degrees. Suffice it to say that circumstances over which I had no control—I will not mention her name—forced me from an as yet unlucrative profession to follow a traveling street fair."

"I was in a street fair once," said Ali, "with a trained chimp."

"The transition from Walter Merlin, B.A, M.S, and so forth, to Merlin the Wizard was an abrupt one which required artificial aid," continued Merlin. "The digital dexterity acquired for finer purposes simply refused to be applied to such ends as making canary birds disappear, unless I could get rid of my self-conscious alter ego by plying him with drink. In other words, to produce the Magician with the Punch, it was necessary to spike the punch.

"Ah, the vicious circle, my dear Al! To become Merlin the Wizard, I was forced to absorb strong drink. But, by absorbing strong drink, Merlin the Wizard became so incapacitated as to lose his fine cunning and fall from his high station. The balance, my dear Al—but perhaps I don't make myself clear?"

"I think I get you," said Ali Hammed. "You had to get tight to put on your act, and you overtrained."

"Approximately that," said Merlin. "And now, would you mind telling me why and how I am here?"

"Sure," said Ali Hammed. "I go down to port every few weeks to see a movie and maybe chew the rag a little if I find a white sailor or a drunk that ain't too stuck up. Well, I'd just come down the river this morning when I see you getting chucked off the *Gracie D*, and too polluted to complain. So I grabbed you away from the cops to sort of take care of you, and maybe have somebody to talk to. You ever been in Brooklyn?"

"My dear Al," said Merlin, extending an unsteady hand, "you're a gentleman deserving of all my gratitude. And I should be even more grateful if you could procure me a small brandy peg to remove this unhygienic taste from—"

"Nothing doing," interrupted Ali Hammed. "You just swore off the stuff. And I'm going to keep you up here till you get some of it out of your system. You look lousy."

"Perhaps you're right," said Merlin. "After all, I still retain a modicum of self-respect, symbolized by this—

"Great guns, I've been robbed!"

Merlin was feverishly going through his pockets.

"Lose something?" Ali inquired.

"My watch!" exclaimed Merlin. "A gold watch. I'd kept it through thick and thin, as a reminder. It was given to me years ago by the Grand Duke Carlovitch, who is something of a prestidigitator himself, in a grand-ducal sort of way. 'To the King of Magicians and the Prince of Good Fellows,' he inscribed it. As a matter of fact, when I got aboard that infernal *Gracie D.* I was vaguely heading toward the Grand Duke, who, I understand, is living pros-

perously in New York, writing memoirs, selling high-class gentlemen's haberdashery and occasionally making personal appearances in theaters. But now that I've lost the watch—"

"Cheer up," said Ali. "You don't need to tell time up here."

THUS it was that Walter Merlin, B.A, M.S, *et seq*, better known as Merlin the Wizard, became an inhabitant of a small Malay *kampong* not far from the coast, yet in a jungle area, which, by some freak of geology and soil chemistry, had escaped the rubber planters and tin miners.

The native males of the *kampong* were engaged in such industries as sitting in the shade of their long-legged nipa shacks, watching plantains grow, speculating on whether certain coconuts would fall of their own weight or would have to be cut down, seeing that the women took proper care of the rice crop and, on days when a Chinese money lender was expected to collect his monthly ten per cent interest on a rice loan, leaving the *kampong* in a body to go fishing.

It was a pleasant life; and Merlin, going native without a qualm, thrived on it. He wore one of Ali Hammed's extra *sarongs*. He went fishing with the men of the *kampong* and learned to paddle a dugout canoe. He slept on rush mats on the bamboo floor and snored as long and as loudly as if reclining on an innerspring mattress. And he drank nothing stronger than the effervescent milk of green coconuts.

As the weeks rolled by Merlin gained weight. He could hold his arm outstretched without a tremor, and he no longer woke up mornings with a bad taste in his mouth. The luster returned to his eyes. Yet the more health he seemed to radiate, the more restless he became. For several days, instead of lying in the shade and philosophically watching naked brown brats and mangy dogs playing in the hot dust, he puttered about with coconut shells, joints of bamboo, strips of rattan and squares of batik. On the fourth day of his puttering, Merlin the Wizard was ready to give an exhibition of legerdemain.

Before a select circle of Ali Hammed's friends, Merlin produced bantam roosters from empty baskets, made mangosteens multiply between his fingers, cut up headcloths and made them whole again. The spectators were so impressed that they stopped sucking the pulp from their durian seeds and hailed Merlin loudly as *pawang besar*—which, according to Ali Hammed's free translation, meant "hot stuff".

Somehow the approbation of the brown men of the *kampong* did not satisfy Merlin. He began to long for the glare of footlights, for the applause of a white audience, for the crashing chords of a theater orchestra as the curtain fell. His memory went back years—before his series of drunken fiascos in America; before his miserable tour of Australia and New Zealand, with engagements missed and contracts canceled; long before the humiliating barroom performances in the ports of the Orient, which culminated in his stowing away on the *Gracie D.* Beyond all that, Merlin had had a brief period of glory. He wanted very much to have one again.

Although he gave no tongue to his reminiscent mood, it must have communicated itself to Ali Hammed. For, the morning after his performance, Merlin opened his eyes to behold a strange apparition. He sat upright on his sleeping mat, wondering whether he was still dreaming. The figure in the doorway had the build and features of Ali Hammed; yet he was wearing a derby hat, a double breasted suit of tobacco brown, badly rumpled and pinched sharply at the waist, a flamboyant tie of brilliant orange, and shoes that were unmistakably yellow despite a thick coating of greenish mold.

"How do you like my old duds?" inquired Ali, while Merlin stared. "I been saving 'em for a chance like this."

"Like—what?" asked Merlin.

"We're going on the road, Merlin, old boy," said Ali enthusiastically. "I decided it last night after I caught your act. You ought to get bookings anywhere, with me along to sort of—well, keep you from overtraining, and to take care of the animals."

"Animals?"

"Sure, a couple of animals would improve the act. We'd have to start out with just Pansy."

"Pansy? You forget, my dear Al, that my knowledge of Malay—"

"Pansy's a bear," said Ali. "I named her after a dame I used to know in Brooklyn—a dark dame, almost black, you might say, about the color of this bear. She was kind of clumsy and affectionate like the bear, too. Pansy belongs to my cousin in the next *kampong*, but I trained her. This morning I walked over and borrowed her. She's here now. *Sini*, Pansy!"

The bear entered the hut with a bound and stood regarding Merlin with great interest, its long pink tongue hanging from between formidable looking white teeth. It was a small bear, common to Malaysia, with strong vegetarian tastes, but Merlin recoiled instinctively. The bear ambled closer and licked his nose.

"Pansy won't hurt you," said Ali. "She likes people, mostly. And she loves coconuts. Boy, you ought to see her bust open a coconut with one swipe of her paw, and then drink up the milk. She's got a lot of cute tricks I taught her."

Merlin was walking nervously about the hut. The bamboo floor creaked beneath his bare feet. He stopped in a corner to finger tenderly his frayed suit of whites hanging there.

"Yes," he said, as if talking to himself, "I see where I could use the bear in an unusual variation of Hermann's cocoon illusion. I'd make a drumhead of a fresh sheet of paper, rapidly sketch the bars of a cage, break the paper, and the bear would spring forth. You'd be there to take care of it, of course, my dear Al."

"I'm all steamed up over the idea," said the Malay. "I guess I got a hankering to get back to the pavements after all. We could start at the little theater they got down in Port Dillingworth. That'd stake us as far as Singapore or Penang. We'd play Singapore for enough jack to jump to Manila, then Hongkong and Shanghai. And first thing you know we'd be back in the States."

"I'm afraid it's all an idle dream," said Merlin wistfully, letting the sleeve of his coat drop and taking a hitch in his *sarong*. "You forget that I haven't a stitch of clothing suitable for appearance in a respectable theater. I haven't even a clean deck of cards, or a speck of filthy lucre."

"Don't worry about cash," said Ali Hammed. "I went to a Chinese hock shop and I—I pawned my kris." The corners of Ali's mouth turned down with the mournful expression of a small boy who has put his last penny into a slot machine and is unable to make the chocolate come out. "It was a swell kris—all inlaid with gold and colored stones in the handle. It had a wavy Bugis blade. My ancestors killed a lot of folks with it. But the Chink would only give me forty-three Straits dollars on it. Is it enough, do you think, for a starter?"

"I'm deeply touched by your sacrifice, my dear Al," said Merlin. "I'm sure that the forty-three dollars will be ample, and that they shall return to you many fold."

"Great," said Ali, smiling again.

MERLIN came down the river in a dugout with Pansy the bear and Ali Hammed, the latter dressed in his derby, flashy store clothes and moldy yellow shoes. The attap house of an uncle of Ali's, who lived in the outskirts of the town, served as headquarters until a Singhalese barber and fifteen dollars' worth of white clothes from a

Chinese outfitter had made a *tuan* out of Merlin. Then a hired motor car met Merlin and his fifth-hand valise a mile out of town and drove into Port Dillingworth as if it had just come from the Singapore Express, which stopped some twenty miles distant.

"If they knew you'd been living in a *kampong* they wouldn't book the act," explained Ali, whose strategy this was.

Merlin paid off the car at the Sir Stamford Raffles Cinema. He called on the manager, a nearsighted little man named Jitterton-Brown, suffering from an excess of dignity and pimples, who vaguely remembered the name Merlin and imagined he had read it in some theatrical journal.

"Well, well, Merlin the Magician," said Jitterton-Brown. "I seem to recall that you were once under the management of a man named Arthur. Or was it Mallory? No matter. I can give you a trial booking. Added attraction, along with the pictures. Put you between Mary Miles Minter and Charlie Chaplin, perhaps. Forty dollars."

"Forty-three," said Merlin.

"Odd figure," said Jitterton-Brown, "but I'll meet it. If they like you, we'll talk about a full evening's performance. More money, of course. Glad you came in. You'll go on at ten o'clock."

Merlin went about the professional preparations for his première with an almost boyish elation, which collapsed with a chill of apprehension in midafternoon. Emerging from a ship chandler's shop after buying a length of new rope for the Miraculous Escape Illusion, Merlin was struck with the familiar appearance of a ship tied up at the deepwater dock. He hurried back into the shop to question the Eurasian clerk.

"The *Gracie D*," said the clerk. "Calls here quite regular. She's sailing for Cheribon late tonight."

The salubrious calm built up by Merlin's recent simple life suddenly disintegrated. The situation was fraught with distressing possibilities. His memory of the officers and crew of the *Gracie D.* was slightly blurred, to say the least; but they, on the other hand, doubtless had very clear recollections of him. Suppose he should be recognized!

MERLIN was still in a blue funk at 9:30 that night. He had been hiding in his dressing room—a stifling cubicle that smelled strongly of smoked rubber—for hours. The Sir Stamford Raffles Cinema had once been a rubber godown, and the transformation from warehouse to theater had been accomplished by stretching a screen across the center. On one side of the screen the white inhabitants paid a dollar to loll in armchairs or sip drinks from small tables while watching ancient silent films. On the other side the brown, yellow and black inhabitants paid ten cents for the privilege of squatting on the ground to watch the same picture backward.

From the native half of the theater came shouts and cheers, as the betel-chewing spectators warned the shadow hero that the shadow villain had evil intentions. From the white half—in which was the stage—came only the faint clinking of glasses. Merlin listened, morosely regarding an unopened quart of Scotch whisky he had procured for emergencies.

He went to the single window, which looked down a side street to the waterfront. At the end of the street were the lights of a ship. The *Gracie D.* was still there. If only Merlin had the Grand Duke's watch to flaunt in the face of challengers! But he hadn't. He had only the bottled courage. He turned from the window and uncorked the Scotch.

"Hey, Merlin, old boy." Ali Hammed was standing outside the window, his derby cocked over his left ear. "Can we come in?"

"We?" asked Merlin.

His question was answered by the appearance of a long black snout above the window sill, followed by a dark,

furry mass. Ali clambered into the room after his bear. Merlin noted that he no longer wore his bright orange tie or his moldly yellow shoes.

"I told you I wouldn't use the bear tonight," said Merlin.

"I been giving Pansy her exercise," said Ali. "They won't let me in on the white side of the theater to watch your act, and it made me kind of nervous. So—" Ali stopped as he saw Merlin staring at his bare feet—"so the walk made Pansy hungry, and I left my shoes in hock to get her some food."

From the exalted gleam in Ali's eyes and a familiar aroma on his breath, Merlin guessed that the shoes had been traded for beverages forbidden by the Koran, rather than for bear fodder. He was about to say so when Ali spotted the quart of Scotch.

"What's in that bottle?" he asked.

"That's—I'm using it in an illusion tonight," said Merlin.

"Let's see," said Ali.

He removed the cork and sniffed, then tipped up the bottle for several long gurgling seconds.

"Tastes like whisky," he commented. "I better keep this so you won't be breaking training, Merlin, old boy."

Before Merlin could object a knock came at the door.

"Picture's over, Mr. Merlin," said a voice. "You're on next."

MERLIN THE WIZARD stood before his first respectable audience in two years. His misgivings gradually disappeared as he started backpalming cards, making them reappear one by one, as if he were picking them off a wire—"upon which I have balanced them endwise, so that they should appear invisible," he explained. There was a ripple of polite amusement, a scattering of applause.

Merlin dared look into the auditorium. He saw white shirt fronts, women in evening dress, glasses on tables, the slow flicker of ceiling fans whirling from the rafters, an informal group of planters and tin miners standing near a bar in back.

Then he snatched two silk handkerchiefs from the atmosphere, caused them to knot and unknot miraculously, made them disappear and reappear inside a green mango, which he produced for the occasion, "out of thin air." He was completely poised, for he had no way of knowing that at that very moment he was the subject of a spirited conversation between the first and second mates aboard the *Gracie D.*

"I got a joke on you," said the Second. "I just come from the Raffles Cinema. And do you know who's there, full rigged and doin' magic tricks, swell as a bloomin' lord? That bum you hoisted outa No. 1 hold a coupla trips back, and he got away."

"The blighter!" exclaimed the first mate.

"And a funny thing," continued the Second. "He's usin' the same name that's engraved in the back o' that gold watch you say you bought second-handed in Penang—Merlin, ain't it?"

"The fraud!" barked the first mate uneasily.

"I don't suppose he could of had the watch when you throwed him out o' the ship, could he?" suggested the Second slyly. "I don't suppose he could of lost it aboard—"

"Is that tramp handing out lies like that?" demanded the mate.

"Not yet, he ain't," admitted the Second, raising his eyebrows.

"And he won't, neither!"

The First was fuming with unrighteous indignation. His sense of guilt demanded loud self-justification. Not being a man given to squirming, he became furiously vindictive toward his former victim. The idea of a crummy beachcomber being the cause of the shadow of suspicion falling upon a first mate—and a first mate with master's papers, at that!

"He's a blooming crook, that's what he is," roared the First. "I'll put him

in jail, where he belongs. I'll show him —I'll go right up now and show him!"

"There ain't time," said the Second. "We cast off in thirty minutes."

"It won't take me ten," stormed the First.

Exactly three minutes later the first mate was pushing his way into the rear of the theater just as Merlin was saying:

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, the famous rope-tie-and-escape that has never been equaled, even by the great Houdini, as I will perform it in full view of the audience."

"Fake!" shouted the first mate from the rear.

"May I call your attention to this length of rope," continued Merlin, with a nervous glance in the direction of the voice.

"Fake!" repeated the first mate. "He's no bleeding magician. He's a drunken sot and stowaway, he is. I know the blighter."

There was a mild commotion as the mate started toward the stage. Necks were craned. Merlin tried his best to ignore the disturbance.

"Will some member of the audience come upon the stage," he repeated by rote, "to examine the rope and, with his own hands, tie me securely to this chair?"

"I'll tie you all right, all right," roared the mate, as he sprang upon the stage.

The temperature of Merlin's blood dropped forty degrees. The mate's beady eyes, round head and brown beard awakened only blurred associations; but the white uniform of the ship's officer told the whole story. Yet he forced a smile. A murmur and a whisper of polite laughter ran through the audience. The audience was not yet sure whether this was part of the act or not.

With difficulty Merlin detached his dry tongue from the roof of his mouth to say:

"Thank you for responding so promptly. You seem to be a seafaring man and consequently an authority on ropes and knots. I'm pleased that a specialist will vouch—"

"I'll vouch you all right, all right," bellowed the mate, snatching the rope. "I'll batten you down with bowlines and half-hitches and then drag you to jail where you belong, you sot! Magician, my eye! Sit down, you!"

The audience laughed a little.

"If you will now bind my hands to the back of the chair—"

"Pipe down, you! I'm doing this!"

The gleaming yellow strands of the new cordage bent and writhed and looped in the mate's agile fingers. As Merlin felt the bights tighten about his arms, he told himself that the mate knew his job. He expanded his chest, his muscles. Beneath the expert pull and pressure of the mate's knots, he began to wonder whether he could hold the few inches of slack necessary for the success of his escape. Still, Merlin knew his job. New rope is stiff, purposely ill adapted to efficient knots.

"Now you're my prisoner, you are," announced the mate, with a final tug, "or I'm skipper of the *Lusitania*."

"In five minutes, ladies and gentlemen," declared Merlin, "I shall escape. Will some one please time me?"

"I'll give you three minutes," said the mate. "I'm in a hurry. And even if you wiggle loose, you ain't escaping. I'll teach you the *Grace D.* ain't no free ferryboat for beachcombers. And I'll time you myself."

He whipped a watch from his pocket.

Merlin's eyes bulged. His watch! The mate was holding *his* watch—the gold watch presented by Grand Duke Carlovitch to the King of Magicians and the Prince of Good Fellows!

"I'll make a side wager with you," said Merlin in a low, tense voice. "Anything you want—against that watch—that I'll be free in less than three minutes."

"Mind your business!" said the mate. "Stand by. Full ahead!"

Merlin went feverishly to work. He

had managed to steal a little slack from the mate, but not so much as he usually got from less expert volunteers. The new rope chafed his wrists. He emptied his lungs, squirmed in his bonds. His pores oozed perspiration.

"One minute gone," announced the mate.

Merlin was working frantically at his right hand. He bunched his thumb and fingers to reduce the hand to the breadth and thickness of his wrist. With one hand free, the rest would be simple. He tugged, contracted and expanded his muscles to make more slack.

"Two minutes!" announced the mate.

Something touched Merlin's face moistly, and a sidelong glance revealed Pansy, the Malay bear, licking his face. Damn Ali Hammed! Why had he let the animal come on the stage at a moment like this? Drunk, probably. Ali had been hitting the whisky, and had left the door open.

"Pansy!" exclaimed Merlin.

The mate whirled menacingly.

"What?" he roared.

Then all menace went out of him, as he beheld the bear. The sound of his voice intrigued Pansy, who left off licking Merlin to go for the mate. The mate immediately gave up timing the famous rope-tie-and-escape. He started to run. The bear bounded clumsily after him.

There was a movement of panic in the first seats of the theater. A woman screamed. People were retreating, pushing to the rear of the theater toward the exits.

The mate tripped on the edge of the stage cloth and fell flat. The Grand Duke's gift watch rolled from his hand. Forgetting his bonds for an instant, Merlin instinctively leaned forward toward the watch—*his* watch, presented to the King of Magicians, symbol of self-respect, reminder of his moment of past glory, now lying just out of reach at the edge of the stage. The ropes pulled Merlin back into his chair just as Pansy the bear landed astride the mate's back with all four paws.

WHETHER Pansy fancied a resemblance between the mate's bearded head and a husked, ripe coconut, or whether she was merely in a playful mood, something was causing her to indulge in lively footwork on the rear person and shoulder blades of the prostrate mate. The mate emitted terrifying noises, and the rush to the exits became a near panic.

The sight of the bear astride the mate, of the watch lying on the floor, of the frightened spectators bolting for the exits, acted as a triple goad to Merlin. While his hands moved in a frenzy behind his back, he talked to Pansy and told her to behave; but Pansy did not understand English. One hand pulled free, then the other. Merlin squirmed out of the rope coils just as Pansy, perhaps sensing a threat in the mate's bellowing, stopped playing. With horror Merlin saw the bear raise a heavy paw for a serious swipe at the mate's head.

Merlin dived, tackling the bear's hind quarters. Surprised, Pansy sat down without further ado.

Instantly the mate regained his feet, bolted across the auditorium, still bellowing, to plunge through the exits with the rear guard of the panic. He did not stop to pick up the watch.

Still clasping the bear's furry haunches with one arm, Merlin reached for a loop of the rope that lay in a tangle about the legs of the chair. He slipped it over the bear's head and rose to his feet.

"Al?" he called. "Ali Hammed?"

There was no answer.

The bear was straining at its improvised leash, showing eager interest in the last of the crowd. Merlin twisted the rope noose, pulling in the opposite direction. With a little choking sound, the bear recognized Merlin's authority and followed obediently to the dressing room. Merlin closed the window and locked up the bear. Then he hurried back for his watch. As he stooped

eagerly to pick it up, Manager Jitterton-Brown returned to the deserted auditorium with a squad of native police, armed with rifles, obviously primed for bear-hunting.

"Where is it?" demanded Jitterton-Brown.

"Where's what?" asked Merlin innocently, holding the watch to his ear to make sure it was still ticking.

"That bear," said Jitterton-Brown.

Merlin put the watch into his pocket and laughed. With the Grand Duke's watch in his pocket he could laugh at anything.

"That was all an illusion," he said.

"Nonsense," said Jitterton-Brown. "Everybody saw the bear. Everybody heard it. Where is it?"

"I'm something of a ventriloquist," Merlin replied, "as well as an illusionist."

"Do you mean to imply that all these people merely *thought* they saw a bear?" demanded Jitterton-Brown. "Impossible."

"Ill advised, I will concede," said Merlin, "but not impossible. These same people thought they saw me produce a mango out of thin air. You no doubt suspect that the atmosphere is not actually the source of the world's mangoes."

"Yes," admitted Jitterton-Brown, "but with a bear, I don't see how—"

"Of course, you don't," said Merlin. "And my vow of secrecy to the International Society of Magicians prevents me from giving you the explanation, much as I should like to reassure you."

Merlin paused. The blast of a steamer whistle sounded in the night. The *Gracie D.* was sailing. Merlin took a deep breath.

"According to my timepiece," he continued, drawing his newly recovered watch with a great flourish, "which, by the way, was presented to me by the Grand Duke Carlovitch and is inscribed 'To the King of Magicians and Prince of Good Fellows,' it is high time that we get on with the show. What *has* become of the audience, by the way?"

"I dare say most of them are at the Port Dillingworth Club, just across the *padang* from the theater," said Jitterton-Brown, "drinking *stengahs* and crowding the club veranda for a good safe view of the bear hunt."

"May I suggest," said Merlin, returning his watch to his pocket, "that we dismiss these disappointed bear hunters and invite the customers back into the theater, that I may apologize for unwittingly causing a panic? In the interests of confidence and future business, you know—"

Half sheepishly, half wondering, not completely reassured, the white spectators filed back into the Sir Stamford Raffles Cinema to hear Merlin explain that he had not made due allowance for the temper of an audience living on the edge of the jungle, and therefore endowed with a more practical attitude toward animals than the audiences of London, Paris and New York. The audience, nerves still on edge, laughed with unusual boisterousness.

The back of his mind busy with the question of Ali Hammed's whereabouts, his ear cocked for sounds of possible insubordination from the bear in the dressing room, Merlin went on with his routine. With purple mangosteens he performed a variation of the multiplying billiard balls. With a murderous looking butcher knife he cut to ribbons a borrowed lace handkerchief, then made it whole again. The audience applauded, fully assured by this time.

THEN an empty bottle smashed at Merlin's feet. An unearthly scream echoed from the corrugated iron roof.

A shadowy, half naked figure was running along the beam from which the motion picture screen was stretched. Shouting in Malay, the climber swung himself down, as agile as a monkey, and dropped to the stage. He snatched up the butcher knife that Merlin had just put down. He stood swaying a mo-

ment, his handsome bronze body clothed only in a loincloth, and a derby hat cocked over one ear.

The audience roared with laughter and burst into loud clapping. This was part of the show, of course—like the bear illusion.

Merlin grasped the hand that held the butcher knife.

"Ali!" he gasped. "My dear Al!"

Ali Hammed struggled to get free. Between grunts he continued to shout in Malay. Merlin seized his other arm in a firm clutch and shook him. Ali looked at him blankly, made a savage face and renewed his struggle. Sudden silence fell upon the audience. The magician no longer seemed to be acting with his usual suave manner. The Malay's bare arms, wet with perspiration, were slipping from his grasp.

Then inspiration came to Merlin. He began talking in a low, soothing monotone. Keeping a tight grip on Ali's right arm with one hand, he made mesmeric passes with the other. He snapped his fingers in front of Ali's glassy eyes.

"You're no longer treading jungle trails," droned Merlin. "No longer do you stalk your enemy with kris and spear. No longer does the *kampong* resound to your *sorak*. You are in America, my dear Al—"

Again he snapped his fingers. Ali Hammed blinked.

"You are in Brooklyn, walking down Nostrand Avenue. Shall we take the subway to meet Pansy?"

The knife dropped from Ali's hand.

"Hullo, Merlin, ol' boy, ol' boy, ol' boy," he said in thick, but unmistakably American, accents. "How's tricks?"

The applause was uproarious.

Merlin pushed Ali Hammed from the stage, locked him in the dressing room with the bear and returned to the stage to bow to the continued applause. Jitterton-Brown met him in the wings.

"Most effective finale," said the manager. "Splendid. Great fun, making that hypnotized Malay talk American. You must come to the club with me and shake hands with people. They all want to meet you. No, no, you can't refuse. Absolutely imperative you meet the best people in view of your longer engagement at the theater. Come along."

IT WAS three o'clock in the morning before Merlin could steal back to the dark theater. He let himself into the dressing room and made a light. Ali Hammed was asleep on the floor, his head pillowed on Pansy the bear. When Merlin woke him up, he groaned, then burst out weeping.

"I'm washed up," said Ali. "I can't take it. The partnership is off. I got tight on us and disgraced the act. I lost my pants. I lost my store clothes. I guess I wasn't meant to wear 'em. I'll stick to the *sarong*. I can't take it, that's all."

"You were a tremendous success," said Merlin. "You need sleep. We'll talk about it tomorrow when you—well, feel better."

"No use," insisted Ali. "I'm sober enough now to know that pants make a bum out of me. That's enough. Pansy and me are paddling back up the river tonight."

Merlin put a bundle of bills in the Malay's hand.

"First of all," said Merlin, "here are the forty-three dollars to redeem your kris. They are but an infinitesimal part of my debt to you, my dear Al. But after our engagement in Singapore—"

"Have we got bookings in Singapore?" The tone of the Malay's voice changed.

"After our success tonight, I am confident we can play at least two weeks in Singapore," said Merlin. "I met a man at the Port Dillingworth Club who has already offered us bookings at Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur. He particularly likes the finale we improvised tonight. We can make a few changes, of course. I'll be more vigilant to prevent your overtraining. And under these circumstances, my dear Al, your deserting the

act is not to be considered."

"Maybe if I had a couple of aspirin tablets," ventured Ali.

"And sleep," added Merlin. "Do you know what time it is?"

"Time never did mean a thing to me," said Ali.

"It will henceforth," said Merlin, producing his watch with a grand gesture. "It is now sixteen minutes past three o'clock."

"The Grand Duke's ticker!" exclaimed Ali.

"The same," said Merlin, "as presented to the King of Magicians and the Prince of Good Fellows by the Grand Duke Carlovitch. I must have inadvertently left the watch aboard the *Gracie D.* The captain, of course, had no way of locating me while I was your guest, and thus couldn't return it until tonight when he saw my name on the front of the theater. He delegated the first mate to make a ceremonial return, on behalf of himself and crew. It was a stirring public presentation. Even the audience was stirred. Ah, my dear Al, I'm sorry you missed it."

Island of Castaways

By LAWRENCE G. GREEN

CASTAWAYS seldom refuse to leave their lonely tropic isles when a ship arrives. On the island of Annobon, however, I found a strange legion of black Robinson Crusoes whose forefathers never ceased being grateful for the shipwreck that stranded them.

Annobon is a tiny island, only four miles in length, lying off the West African coast. Four hundred years ago a Portuguese schooner, bound from the Congo to Brazil with slaves packed under her hatches, struck a reef off the island. The slaves swam ashore rejoicing, no doubt leaving their owners to the sharks; and their descendants, two thousand of them, live happily on Annobon to this day.

Steamers hardly ever visit Annobon, for there is little trade. I watched the island peaks rising over the horizon from the deck of a dingy Spanish coaster in search of cocoa to fill her empty holds. Our anchor rattled down in a calm harbor.

From plank and mud huts among the palm groves and orange trees came the excited islanders. Their own black headman was in the leading canoe, and an interpreter, who spoke the strange pidgin English of West Africa, came out.

The bargaining was like the old trading days. Besides the sacks of cocoa, pigs, fowls, pineapples, limes, oranges and tamarinds were offered. Old clothes, guns, spirits, tobacco were given in exchange. Money had no meaning.

There was a huge black mass on the beach, and by the powerful odor we knew that it was a dead whale. The islanders are expert whalers, chasing the leviathan in the old fashioned way with open boats and harpoons flung by hand.

In the tropics a native who lives forty years is reckoned an old man; but Annobon is healthful compared with the mainland of West Africa, and many aged natives are found there. The waters of the island are so rich in fish that a hook baited with a red rag is seized voraciously. Fruit and vegetables grow abundantly in the volcanic soil. There is a lake of excellent fresh water.

Many poor communities in Europe might well envy the black castaways of Annobon.

BUZZARDS KNOW

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Hashknife Hartley"

THE Coachella Kid left a plain trail. After killing Deputy Jack Welden with an iron cot leg, he stole a gun and ammunition, saddled one of the sheriff's horses and headed straight for the desert. It all happened only a few minutes after the jury had been sent to deliberate on the guilt or innocence of the Coachella Kid, who was charged with first degree murder.

It was the first time the Kid had ever been tried—his first time to face a judge and jury. Only luck had allowed him to travel his crooked trail this long. Several times he had escaped the clutches of the law by the narrowest of margins. Twice he had killed deputy sheriffs—but no one could prove it. The Coachella Kid was a cold-eyed killer, contemptuous of the law; and for five years he had nursed a bitter hate against Dave Fulton, the sheriff who had finally arrested him.

The Coachella Kid was a small man, wiry as a bobcat, soft-spoken; he was not over thirty-five years of age. There was nothing conspicuous about him. He had been very quiet during his trial, until the sheriff, speaking from the witness stand, recited a brief résumé of what he knew about the Coachella Kid's past. Then the Kid got to his feet.

"Me and him loved the same girl five years ago," he said, barely loud enough for the jury to hear. "He got her by lyin' to her about me. He's scared I'm goin' to make him pay for them lies; so he's tryin' to git me hung."

Then the Kid sat down and refused to talk any more.

But the Kid was free now, well mounted and armed. Men saw him ride through Yucca City; and they recognized the sheriff's black horse. Ten miles farther on he rode the length of the main street at Signal Rock, where he was seen and recognized. It would have been easy for him to circle both towns.

At the Smoke Tree ranch he stopped to water his horse and fill an enormous canteen, which he had stolen from the sheriff's stable. There was only one cowboy at the ranch at the time, and he did not know the rider was an escaped prisoner until the sheriff arrived an hour later.

The Coachella Kid did not hurry. He was heading for the worst spot in the desert—a section where rain never falls, where there are no water-holes, where the blackened rocks are like uncooled lava. Heat waves shimmered and danced before him as he rode toward the vague line of broken hills. Mirages appeared across stretches of dry lake beds. The Coachella Kid paid them no heed.

Mile after mile he rode, scourged by thirst, but refusing to touch the precious fluid in his canteen. He knew the horse must die, but he wanted to reach those hills before taking to foot travel. He knew of a single water-hole, miles and miles beyond the hills; and he knew that the one canteen of water would enable him to make that spot on foot. From there another full canteen would take him to a ranch where he would be safe for awhile.

THE Coachella Kid had a sinister purpose in making this trip.

He knew Dave Fulton very well indeed. With his only deputy lying dead, Dave Fulton would ride alone; and Dave Fulton rarely failed to get his man. It would have been a simple matter for the Kid to ambush and kill the sheriff, thus delaying any pursuit for several days. But the Kid wanted a more satisfactory revenge.

That night he made a dry camp in a clump of ocotillo. After riding almost to the clump, he turned right on a back-track for some distance, swung to the left in a wide circle and came to the clump from almost an opposite direction. If the sheriff followed the Kid's horse tracks in the sand, he must first ride up close to the bandit's hiding place.

The Kid left the weary horse saddled and tied. It was only a few more miles to the broken hills. The Kid had no food, but that did not worry him. Once across the hills, with the sheriff disposed of, he would have a chance to kill a sage rabbit or something. He had eaten buzzards and rattlesnakes, when hard pressed.

But the sheriff did not come along that night, because the sheriff, several miles behind, was saving his horse. Shortly after daylight the Coachella Kid mounted his horse and rode on. The heat was almost unbearable now, and the Kid realized that he would be lucky to reach the hills. His eyes were swollen from the heat, his face burned raw from the sun reflections on the sand. This was the land of a hundred and thirty degrees in the shade—and no shade.

The Kid had long since ceased to watch his back trail, because the eye strain made his head throb. He drank sparingly of the warm water, cursed the sun and the sand and lashed the stumbling horse with a rope-end. It seemed ages and ages before he reached the rocky hills, where they angled up a small canyon. The heat was stifling. The horse was weaving drunkenly. The Kid dismounted. Unfastening the heavy canteen from the saddle, he booted the horse in the belly.

"You're through," he told the suffering animal. "Buzzards will git a feed for once in their lives, and I—"

An idea struck him suddenly. Whipping out his sixshooter, he shot the animal dead. The crack of the revolver echoed back from the rocks and the

Kid wondered whether any one had heard it. With an old knife he had taken from the dead deputy he cut a generous hunk of meat from the horse. It would be enough to feed him for several meals, and was better than taking a chance on rattlesnakes or buzzards.

Then he swung the canteen over his shoulder and went on. The heat of the sand almost cooked his feet. As he searched for just the right place he purposely staggered, making tracks like a drunken man, indicating to any possible pursuer that he was nearly at the point of collapse. Finally he went through a narrow cut in the rocks, dropped his canteen in the shade and sat down. Here was the spot where he would get even with Dave Fulton.

HE TOOK a generous drink, recapped the canteen and sat down again. Even in that shade the heat was terrific. Not a breath of air stirred. He examined his sixshooter gingerly, because it was so hot. The chunk of horse meat was already getting dry, like jerky.

For two hours or more the Coachella Kid sat there, suffering acutely from the heat, wondering whether the sheriff had really followed him. Suppose he had not? Suppose he guessed why the Kid had gone away openly? The Kid cursed grimly.

Suddenly his keen ears detected a sound—the sound of boots in sand. He froze against the rock, his cocked gun in his hand. A shadow struck across the narrow opening, and the crunch of footsteps came closer. It was Dave Fulton, hunched, watchful as a hunting cat. The Kid blended well with the rocks; and perhaps the sheriff's eyes were a little blinded from the glaring sunlight. He was carrying his sixshooter tightly in his right hand.

Then the Coachella Kid, as deadly of aim as a striking rattler, fired the first shot; he fired it at the sheriff's gun hand, and the sheriff's gun flew from his numbed fingers and clattered down among the rocks.

As quick as a flash the sheriff dropped flat on his left side, twisting as he fell. His clawing left hand found the gun. The Coachella Kid managed to swing his head and shoulders behind a rock, while the sheriff, shooting with the wrong hand, and from a bad position, fired five shots at what little he could see of the Kid. None of them took effect, and when the Kid knew the sheriff's gun was empty he came from behind the rock.

The sheriff looked at him through red-rimmed eyes, and the Kid laughed insanely at him. He forced the sheriff to his feet, took away his belt and gun. Then he took the sheriff's nearly empty canteen and drank it dry, flinging it far off in the rocks.

"You fell for my trap, didn't you, Dave?" He chuckled huskily.

"I found the horse," replied the sheriff, "and then I seen your tracks. I—I thought you was about all in, Kid."

"Fooled you, eh?" jeered the Kid.

"Why?" asked the sheriff wearily.

"Why? I've allus said I'd git you some day, Fulton. You thought you'd send me to the gallows, eh? You was wishin' me plenty hell, wasn't you? Well, I trapped you out here to give you a little taste of hell. I could have shot you—easy. But that ain't revenge. No livin' man can walk back to that Smoke Tree ranch—and that's the nearest water. The buzzards will finish you. Me, I'm goin' the other way. I've got food and I've got water. You're thirsty right now."

"Yeah, I'm thirsty," admitted the sheriff. "But why didja kill Jack Welden?"

"Why? You fool, I had to kill him to git away. They can't hang you any higher for killin' two than they can for killin' one."

"Then you admit murderin' Ab Hill?"

"Admit it? Of course, I admit it."

The sheriff's split lip twisted in a curious smile.

"I was pretty sure of it—but you

never can tell about a jury."

"What about the jury?" asked the Coachella Kid hoarsely.

"They'd found you not guilty. The foreman told me they'd just reached a decision when we learned you had killed Welden and made your escape."

The Kid's face twisted queerly and he licked his cracked and bleeding lips with his dry tongue.

"Not guilty?" he whispered. "Not guilty? I'll be damned!"

He backed up a few steps, staring at the sheriff. Not guilty! Why, he didn't have to kill Welden. He could have been free if he had waited a few minutes. A black shadow passed over the glaring white sand, and he glanced up at a huge buzzard, moving about on motionless wings. He shifted his burning eyes to the sheriff and laughed queerly—a sound like the crumpling of paper.

"You can't tell about a jury," he said. "You jist—can't—tell—about. . ."

"Your canteen's leakin'," said the sheriff huskily.

The Coachella Kid started to look, jerked back, his cocked gun covering the sheriff. He was wise in the ways of gunmen and their tricks.

"No, you don't," he whispered. "I'm no damn fool."

"Look at it," urged the sheriff.

The Coachella Kid snarled wickedly as he backed toward the canteen. His heel struck it, and it rang emptily. As quick as a flash the Kid half-turned and swept it from the sand; but in that flash the sheriff stepped behind the rock, leaving the Kid standing there dangling his empty, bullet-riddled canteen in his left hand.

With a withering curse, the Kid ran erratically to the tall rock, searching with burning eyes for the sheriff, who was somewhere out there in that glare. He flung the useless canteen from him and leaned helplessly against the rock. No use to follow the sheriff. He was crazy if he thought he could make that far-away water-hole.

Thirty minutes later, far off the slope of the hill, the sheriff shuffled up to a jumble of lava rocks, from under which he dug a large canteen of water. He drank sparingly in the shade and splashed some of it over his head.

"I can easy make it back to my horse by dark," he assured himself, "and by mornin' I can be pretty close to Smoke Tree. It's hell on a fellow's head and feet; but this old desert ain't hard to beat—if you've got water."

He took another small drink, corked the canteen carefully and got to his feet.

"I reckon them buzzards has done lit some'eres," he muttered, after scanning the sky above the hills.

"You can shore fool a jury—but buzzards know."

BROTHERS

By HENRY LACOSSITT

Author of "Saint Nosedive"

THAT year in Haiti was notable principally for three things: One was the heat; the second was the rising of the *caco*, Richelieu, called the Cardinal; and the third was the astonishing case of David Rankin, the cigar smoker.

The heat came down early, with the rains. It lay over the land tightly, a thing to try men's bodies as well as their minds, for the specter of malaria stalked among natives and whites alike; and the curse that is tropical madness crept through the barracks of the Marines and entered even the brilliant gardens of the officers' homes.

And through the heat there beat incessantly, like a feverish and fretful pulse, the throbbing rhythm of the drums of the hill people. Never pleasant, the sound became more sinister in the heat; for it seemed as if the voices of dark and ancient gods were thundering mysterious threats at the *blancs*. At any rate, the *blancs*—meaning, largely, the Marines—wondered.

"You can hear it ten thousand feet up," snarled Lieutenant Purcell, the aviator, who got drunk every afternoon and who bore the nickname of Crazy.

It got on your nerves.

And then one day the drums seemed to rise in crescendo and the Marines ceased to wonder. For that was the day Private Dacy came galloping up before Madame Champendal's saloon with two bullets in his body and with the news that Richelieu, the Cardinal, had risen in the bush with a strong band and had wiped out the gendarmerie post at Kilometer 83. He had flayed Captain Kirk of the Marines alive, and then feasted on him in order to absorb, through his flesh, the courage and knowledge of the *blancs*. . .

Now there was one on whose nerves the throbbing of the drums had had little effect. This was David Rankin, the cigar smoker; but, after all, David

Rankin was a very strange person.

In the first place, there were the cigars. Where others in the barracks used pipe or cigaret due to preference or economy, David Rankin smoked long black perfectos from Cuba, bought with funds sent him from home; and he smoked an inordinate number of them. It was his only vice.

He was a tall youth, well made and athletic, with black hair and smoky, black eyes. The eyes were very grave. His mouth was solemn with the solemnity that is frequently burlesqued, and he had a high bridged, ecclesiastical nose. He very rarely had much to say, and when he said it you felt like placing the tips of your fingers together and holding your hands before your chest like an acolyte. His voice rumbled deeply in his throat like that of a monk in an empty cathedral.

His peculiarities did not end here. Back in New England, where David Rankin had been a student at a theological seminary, he had encountered doctrines not at all soldierly. He had studied things that led him to believe firmly in the brotherhood of man—things such as the Jacobins expounded and such as were written by old Tom Paine.

He believed in and applied these theories sincerely until the World War came along, when he became obsessed with a desire to save the world, and—possibly—the brotherhood of man. Germans, because he was convinced they threatened the great ideal, ceased to be Germans and became Huns. So he joined the Marines.

He was sent to Haiti as a part of the American occupation.

His only feeling concerning that unlooked-for complication was one of disappointment; for among the things David Rankin did not own was a sense of humor.

His disappointment, however, did not last, for he saw in Haiti a golden opportunity to apply his theories. Haitians, after all, were not Germans, and the Haitian state had been prominent in the Jacobin discourses; so he made a speech to his fellows in the barracks, who thought it very funny indeed. They listened and laughed; but they did not dislike David, although they thought him a bit balmy.

Then he made another speech, but this time to the natives, who listened patiently, understood none of it—David spoke in pure French—and thought David's voice beautiful.

David, however, learned the patois of Haitian Creole; so the Corps discovered something for him to do other than the ordinary duties of soldiering. Since he was a good mechanic, they attached him to the aviation service.

He was assigned to Crazy Purcell, who was the best aviator in Haiti. Crazy was big, rangy, absolutely without fear, tough as a mahogany knot, with hard gray eyes, a broken and pugnacious nose and a leathery, weather-beaten face. When he spoke it seemed as if he snarled, and it was quite obvious that he held no traffic with the brotherhood of man. The natives said that he was a supernatural being who rode a magic monster bird through the sky.

When Crazy got a good look at his new mechanic he naturally said—

"Let us pray!"

David liked him immediately.

Then Crazy set out in his delicate way to get David's goat, but David couldn't see it. When Crazy took him up and stunted him into delirious sickness, he thought it was all part of the game. When Crazy sent him on errands that involved such military necessities as a propeller blade sharpener or a wing spreader, David was puzzled, but that was all.

For his part, David adored Crazy Purcell. He gave Crazy cookies from boxes his mother sent him; he gave Crazy numerous cigars. He did various small things for Crazy's comfort and he told the pilot about the brotherhood of man and what had been said con-

cerning the Haitian state by the *Amis des Noirs* during the French Revolution until Crazy grew a bit puzzled himself.

"He even takes a book up with him," said Crazy with awe, "and the other day he gave me a rag rug he said his mother made for me. Now what the hell will I do with a rag rug?"

CAME a day in that hot season of the rains when Crazy Purcell was called to Port au Prince on official matters, and it so happened that David could not go, having been lent to another officer on a particularly knotty problem of motors. So Crazy went off with another mechanic. Before he left, however, David, his solemn face coated with perspiration and grease, and one of his great black cigars between his teeth, came running across the field to stand respectfully before the plane and salute smartly.

"Now what?" growled Crazy, for he was in an ill humor because of the heat and the ominously thundering drums.

David held out a handful of paper gourdes.

"If you would be so kind, sir," he said, "and if it would not interfere with your private or official business, would you please get me two boxes of cigars? I'd appreciate it very much, sir."

Crazy Purcell looked long at his mechanic, then took the money.

"O. K," he said and grinned. "Sure, I'll get 'em."

So next day, seated on the rickety wooden porch of Madame Champendal's saloon with several other officers, Crazy Purcell sent for his mechanic. He had just returned from the capital, an hour's flying time distant.

David, who had started work on Crazy's plane, came in a hurry and saluted vigorously. Crazy, already a little sunk in his cups, bade David be at rest.

"Here's y' cigars," he said, shoving across the table toward David two boxes bearing a well known Cuban brand.

"Thank you, sir—" began David.

"Wait!" said Crazy. He fished beneath his tunic and drew forth a cigar such as David never had seen. It was equal in size to three of those he usually smoked. "This," went on Crazy, " 's token o' my 'steem. 'S new gift size straight fr'm 'Vana."

David took the enormous cigar, swallowed painfully and looked at his lieutenant with eyes aglow with gratitude.

"You're very kind, sir," he said. "I—"

" 'Tcha gonna smoke it?" inquired Crazy.

"Now?"

"Cer'nly!"

"But, sir," stammered David. "I—that is—the plane—and, well, you see, sir, with the officers—"

"Think nothin' of 't. Have drink?"

"I don't drink, sir."

"Then smoke!"

Crazy pulled David into a chair and David, though a little dismayed, placed the huge cigar in his mouth and bit off the end.

"Here!" said Crazy. He held out a match.

David leaned forward.

But Crazy never lighted the cigar. For it was at that precise moment that Private Dacy came galloping up before Madame Champendal's porch. The nostrils of his horse dripped red foam and its breathing resembled the rasp of a file. Private Dacy, uniform in tatters, bloody from his own and other wounds, slid from his horse, staggered up the steps, saluted and told his tale of horror about Captain Kirk. Then, his eyes red with a hint of madness, he collapsed.

It was then that the distant drums seemed to grow louder, seemed to rise in crescendo. The officers leaped to their feet.

Twenty minutes later Crazy Purcell and David Rankin were in the air.

In his seat forward, Crazy Purcell, his face twisted into a mask of cold fury, scanned the terrain below. In his seat aft, David Rankin, who believed in the

brotherhood of man, clutched the fuselage and wondered.

They neared the jungle, soared over its borders; then changed course and headed eastward. The *savanne* was left behind. The plane dropped and was held at five thousand feet as Crazy Purcell searched the growth below.

Suddenly he shouted.

David started, peered down where his lieutenant was pointing and beheld something that looked like a horde of black beetles on a dunghill, but which he saw in a moment was a group of scurrying natives in a clearing. And then David gasped, for Crazy Purcell put the ship in a dive straight at the clearing. When a hundred feet or so up, the machine gun spat viciously through the propeller blades at the blacks, who rushed pell-mell and screaming for the cover of the jungle.

Crazy brought the ship out of the dive, leveled off, sprayed the jungle with bullets. Then, gaining height again, he swooped down, pancaked and landed in the clearing.

They jumped out.

Crazy, automatic drawn, ran to the edge of the jungle, plunged into it, firing as he went. But the blacks were gone. He turned, cursing, and came back into the clearing. Lying there were the bodies of several natives. Most of them were dead. But one was not. He looked up at Crazy Purcell with fear and hatred in his staring eyes, for Crazy was the supernatural being who rode the magic monster bird through the skies.

"Where is he?" snarled Crazy in Creole. "Where is the Cardinal?"

The native rolled his eyes in terror. He opened his mouth, revealing ugly rows of stained, filed teeth. He writhed his body, naked save for a tattered breech-clout, in an effort to move farther from Crazy's dread presence. But he said nothing. Perhaps he couldn't. And then, with a convulsive spasm, he expired.

Crazy swore a string of vast oaths, kicked the body with his heel, turned to look for David. What he saw caused him to cry out.

AT THE edge of the clearing, standing rigidly, David Rankin was staring at something tied to a breadfruit tree. Crazy ran across the clearing. He too stared, frozen with the same horror that gripped his mechanic.

For tied to the tree with ropes that now were ruddy, with the ground roundabout dark with a familiar red stain, stood what they realized was all that remained of Captain Kirk. It was not much.

For seconds they stood there, David dry eyed, Crazy with tears of grief and rage streaming down his leathery face. In the distance, the throbbing of the drums rose triumphantly in the terrible heat.

They turned away, for it was too much to see. And it was David who spoke first.

"This," he said, his deep voice rumbling solemnly in his chest, "might have been avoided."

For a moment Crazy Purcell did not answer. Then, as if aware suddenly of the implication of David's statement, he turned on his mechanic.

"What's that?" he snapped.

"I mean," said David gravely, "that education of these natives and imposition of trust upon them and intelligent application of equalizing principles—"

Crazy Purcell grabbed David by the throat.

"God!" he snarled. "I'll show you some principles! I'll show you how to apply them intelligently to these niggers! But it'll be from the muzzle of a machine gun! Look at that!"

David looked, his breath laboring with the grip of his lieutenant. Crazy was pointing at the object tied to the tree.

"Apply your principles to that, if you can!"

He released the mechanic and started running for his plane.

"Come on!" he shouted in disgust.

"Hadn't we better bury him?" asked David quietly.

Crazy hesitated, turned and walked silently back. Together, sick in body and soul, they buried what remained of Captain Kirk. They both had known him well. They worked in silence, while sinister birds, which cast dark, distorted shadows in the clearing, circled slowly above. Then, trembling, the distant throbbing in their ears, they walked to the plane.

Crazy Purcell reached within the fuselage and drew out an enormous flask of rum—something he was never without. He drank deeply, cursed as he looked back at the dead natives and up at the circling vultures. Then he offered the bottle to David. David refused.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "I don't drink."

That seemed to irritate Crazy Purcell. Viciously he closed the flask, thrust it back into the fuselage. He snarled something unintelligible at his mechanic, climbed into the plane and reloaded automatic and machine gun.

Once more they soared above the brilliance of the jungle in the merciless radiance of a brazen sun. The afternoon haze had begun to gather about the sullen mountains; solitary in the sky that seemed to dance and vibrate with the heat waves, a white cloud, monstrous and antediluvian, hung listlessly.

Crazy still searched the growths below. Once he dived quickly, his hand on the machine gun, but as quickly came out of it and rose again. What he had seen was a cluster of bush women and children by a stream, bathing and washing such clothes as they possessed. As he dived they ran screaming toward the trees. He circled round and round, never far from the spot where Captain Kirk had stood and died by the breadfruit tree, but saw nothing.

It seemed hopeless. Then from the motor suddenly came a harsh, tearing sound, a grinding that caused the plane to tremble dangerously. A cloud of hot, white, steam-like smoke set them gasping. Crazy immediately shut off the motor. The smoke cleared. The droning motor having ceased, the wind whistling in the wires could not drown the snarling stream of curses that Crazy directed back at his mechanic. He was pointing to the temperature gage. David, his smoky eyes bulging, saw that it was as high as it could go.

David started to climb up into the forward cockpit, but Crazy waved him back. The pilot peered searchingly into the thick mass below, seeking a clearing, gliding skilfully as he did so. He saw one, set the plane toward it, circled gently, rushed downward in a wide spiral. Closer they came and closer, losing speed, the wings wavering.

It was a small, rough spot, rocky and overgrown by dwarf cactus. Up came the trees in a green rush, and Crazy, holding the nose up, made his bid to land. He cleared the highest trees and darted toward the opening. It loomed closer and closer.

There was a shock. The plane plunged through branches which tore its wings and ripped away its undercarriage. It spun half around, nosed over, lunged downward and stopped, hanging in the branches of a huge tree, twenty feet above the ground.

For a moment there was the sound of falling débris and broken branches, then silence.

THE silence was split by the violence of Crazy Purcell directed at his mechanic. He had turned and was staring upward at David, who, white faced, sprawled in the after cockpit above him.

"By the Lord!" shrilled Crazy at the end of his outburst. "Apply principles to this! Why didn't you change the oil?"

David, gasping for breath, his solemn face reddening, said stammeringly—

"I—well, that is, sir—"

"Speak up!"

"I—well, you see, I was working on her when you summoned me this morning, and I intended to go back; but you —well you did insist so, that I stayed to smoke the cigar. And when Dacy came, I forgot it in the excitement."

For a space Crazy Purcell merely glared at the solemn face of his mechanic, a face red and perspiring with embarrassment as its owner strove to keep from sliding out of sight beneath his cockpit. And then Crazy's features relaxed. Little wrinkles appeared about his hard eyes. There was even a soft expression of affection in Crazy Purcell's hard eyes, for it was known that he really liked his odd mechanic.

"Well," he said slowly, "that's that, then. I'll have to go back."

"Oh, no, sir, I'll go. I—"

"I said I'd go!" said Crazy. "I can get through; heaven knows what'd happen to you. Stay with the plane, hear me?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right, then."

Crazy climbed laboriously out of the wrecked plane and slid down the tree; then he tore off his monkey suit. He looked up at his mechanic. David was peering solemnly over the cockpit.

"Stay in your nest!" shouted Crazy.

"Yes, sir."

"You'd better! It's open season here on such birds as you." He turned to go, then stopped. "Remember, don't leave. I mean it! I don't know when I'll be back, but don't leave until I come! Don't go out trying to apply any intelligent prin—well, you know what I mean. Got a book with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Curl up with it. And keep near the machine gun. It's still O.K."

He turned and plunged into the jungle. There was, for a few minutes, the sound of his struggling through the growth, then silence.

David looked at his wristwatch. Two o'clock. He looked around him. To his left, through the trees, he could see the little open space—a glaring, baked spot in the steamy jungle. For perhaps fifteen minutes he stayed in the cockpit and grew vastly uncomfortable. The plane was almost on end and he had to brace himself in order to remain upright. And, in that heat, just remaining upright was difficult enough. He looked longingly at the ground.

It was then that David thought of Crazy's admonition to remain aloft in the tree. Thinking of it, he grew determined. Crazy had reminded David that the bush negroes were dangerous, an idea to which David, believing in the brotherhood of man, did not subscribe. Had he not told Crazy that Captain Kirk's horror might have been avoided?

He slipped out of the plane and slid down the tree; he flung off his monkey suit.

It was much better now. He sat down and thrust his hand in his pocket. There were two objects there—a book and the huge cigar Crazy had brought him from Port au Prince. For a moment his fingers lingered on the cigar, then abandoned it. He would smoke it in the cool of the evening. He drew out the book, which was Thomas Paine's famous reply to Edmund Burke, and he read again that the French Revolutionists had been justified in their violence because the Bourbons had taught it to them.

"Precisely," said David to himself, "the case with Haiti."

It grew hotter. The sun roused new steam clouds. David began to itch. He thought wistfully of the *basins*—the hot baths—back at the barracks, and probably that is what decided him.

Now, whatever Crazy Purcell might have said in regard to the dangers of leaving the plane, the strict order from higher authority than Crazy Purcell was that under no circumstances should a plane be abandoned away from the post. But David, thinking of the *basins* and a little piqued, perhaps, because of Crazy's warnings, decided that he, too, should return to the post—he could get through all right.

HE CLIMBED the tree, which was a *ceiba,* got the machine gun and the little automatic which was in all planes for a certain personal service to the aviators themselves in case of capture, and found, also, the flask of rum which Crazy had left behind in his haste. He got that, too, and descended the tree again. He meant to use none of these things, of course; but the guns were Government property and the rum was Crazy's, and David was very conscientious. Perhaps they would be lost or stolen if left behind. That he was committing insubordination, however, did not enter his mind.

As he reached the ground, he stopped and peered closely into the jungle to his right. Something had moved there. And then he turned quickly to look in front of him, for something very slight, but a movement nevertheless, had attracted him there also. He looked carefully for a minute or two; and then, since nothing happened, set out, the machine gun across his shoulder, the automatic and the flask in his pockets.

But David Rankin was no woodsman. The going became rough. He fought through vines and creepers and brilliant bushes of crimson and purple and blue, and he fought bravely; but he had a feeling he wasn't getting anywhere. As he was becoming quite tired, he started back to the plane. That, however, availed him nothing, for he discovered he was hopelessly lost. Try as he might, he could not find his back trail. Yet he set out again with a hazy idea that he would use the sun, imperfectly seen through the foliage, for guidance. But that, too, proved fruitless; for immediately he came to the decision, the sun darkened and, incredibly swift, a solitary cloud rolled out in an angry sheet, overspreading the brazen sky, and deluged the jungle with rain.

David stopped.

Once more he peered keenly at the jungle, for again he had detected a movement, shadowy but definite, in the thick growth. His eyes, accustomed now to the dense trees, all at once began to catch glimpses of other movements equally shadowy, but also equally definite. They were all about him. He stood in the hot downpour, pondering, until suddenly the reason for these fleeting things struck him. He laughed. He knew, of course, that the natives considered all aviators supernatural beings. And he knew that they dreaded meeting them face to face for fear of unknown and dire consequences.

The rain ceased as abruptly as it had begun. Once more the sun mottled the jungle. Where before the drumming of the downpour had been pleasantly noisy, the jungle was ominously silent save for the sly dripping of the foliage; and even David Rankin, on whose nerves the drums had had little effect, started occasionally with the slap of the drops. It was as if the drops fell and died.

And the shadowy movements continued.

For an instant a little tingle of apprehension ascended his spine as he realized that all around him, hidden by the jungle, unseen eyes were watching him; but the tingle ceased. Within David rose the zealous fire of the crusader.

"My brothers!" David's solemn voice rumbled ministerially against the dripping walls of green. He spoke in Creole. "Be not afraid of me, the *blanc* from the sky. I will not harm you, for I am as yourselves, of flesh and of blood. Therefore, come forth in friendship and safety!"

His rumbling voice ceased. The growth was silent again save for the slapping of the drops. There were, however—something he sensed rather than actually saw or heard—additional movements behind the dense foliage. Yet nothing happened.

That annoyed David. It occurred to him that not only was this an opportunity to apply his principles, but that these natives might guide him back to headquarters. So he repeated his sol-

emn speech, but with the same results.

Therefore, since nothing seemed to be gained by standing there and shouting at the trees, he set out again, but this time, as he fought his way, the movements seemed closer and bolder and now and then he even heard the rustle of a bush or the cracking of a twig. So he halted again.

"Listen, my brothers!" he called. "I repeat that we are the same, you and I. I repeat that I will not harm you. Therefore, come forth!"

And again the movements came closer, grew bolder; and at times as he continued walking he thought that he might reach out and touch something that slithered through the bush nearby, but still nothing occurred.

DAVID'S weariness grew, as did his annoyance; also, the business was getting on his nerves, so he stopped again. This time his rumbling voice held a sharp note. He repeated his sermon and, as he finished, he called, his voice rising with his irritation—

"And I say it again: You and I are brothers!"

For a moment there was silence. Then David started violently. He took a step backward. He had hoped for it, but it came so suddenly that for an instant he was unsettled.

Directly before him the jungle had disgorged a tall savage.

The black was huge, with magnificently molded muscles. His skin glistened in the sunlight that, filtering through the foliage, cast a fantastic pattern over his great body. His skull was round; his lips coarse and thick; his eyes reddened and crafty. His lips hung loosely so that David could see the ugly rows of stained teeth filed to points after the fashion of his Modongo ancestors. He was naked save for a brilliant scarlet breech-clout and a scarlet store ribbon that was tied in his kinky hair.

David moistened his lips.

"I greet you," he said.

For a moment the negro was silent; then he said:

"You have said you will not harm us, that we are brothers. That is true?"

"It is true."

"But you rode the bird with the other *blanc*, who sent death to us."

"It was only that he did not understand that we are one in brotherhood. He has gone and the bird has died. Who are you, my brother?"

"I am Richelieu."

David stared. Again the tingle of apprehension crept up his spine, for there flashed before him the scene in the clearing with the hideous object tied to the death tree; but again the tingling faded. He smiled.

"The one we call the Cardinal?" The black nodded. "I am glad that we have met," continued David, "for I have much to say to you. Call your comrades."

The Cardinal's crafty eyes flickered only a little.

"You will not harm us?" he asked.

"Not so much as a tiny hair."

The black turned and shouted something at the jungle. In response to his cry the growth sprouted men. They seemed to rise from the earth as the warriors rose in the time of Jason of the Golden Fleece, and they moved forward—scores of them. Some were naked except for breech-clouts, some clad in ragged denim trousers; a few bore ancient rifles or pistols, but all carried machetes. They looked at David with expressions of fear and craftiness.

"This *blanc*," said the Cardinal, "swears he will not harm us. We will go with him."

So they went, and David made his first mistake.

"My brother," he said to Richelieu, "will you show me the way back to my people?"

"You are a god from the sky and you know your way back."

David laughed.

"I am not a god," he said. "I am as you. I do not know the way."

The Cardinal hesitated hardly at all. Then he said, his heavy lips split in a strange grin—

"I will show you."

They walked on. David talked. He told the Cardinal it was wrong to do such things as had been done to Captain Kirk, and the Cardinal listened in silence. David said again that he was no god and that they were brothers.

Dusk came on. It faded quickly into night. The Cardinal stopped. David wondered.

"Is it so far?" he asked.

"It is yet far," said the Cardinal. "We stay here this night."

They did, and David made his second mistake. Unused to the ground, to the jungle, to the droning insects that tortured him, he slept very badly. Perhaps the notion that the blacks were sleeping not at all, but watching him intently, had something to do with it. But whatever the cause, he caught fever.

They gave him herbs they had culled from the jungle, and he felt better. So in the morning he prepared to start on, but as they were about to go, he noticed that they fell away from him suddenly. For perhaps fifteen minutes, while he waited, wondering, they were gone; and when they returned they looked at him with a new fear, but also with another expression in their beady eyes.

They started. The sun rose higher, drenching the jungle with heat. David, weary and faint from the fever, asked again—

"Is it so far?"

"It is not far—now," said Richelieu.

David said nothing about his principles or the brotherhood of man, for he wished heartily that he were back at the barracks. It was hotter, he thought; and he began to be aware that the men turned and looked at him curiously and that there was an undercurrent of excitement in their attitudes. Then—it was late afternoon—a new thought struck him.

"I have brought a gift for you," he told the Cardinal, and drew from his inside pocket the enormous cigar Crazy Purcell had given him. "It comes from across the sea and from your brothers, the *blancs*. You understand?"

The Cardinal reached delightedly for the cigar.

"I understand," he said. "I have been in Port au Prince where the *blancs* sell these things and I have smoked them."

The day drew itself out, and David, weary and aching, looked hopefully ahead; but still the jungle was unbroken. When finally the sun had fled, they stood on the bank of a little stream that wound sluggishly through the jungle. The party halted. David, dull with fatigue, stood staring at the water, thinking of the barracks and wondering, now, what Crazy Purcell would say about his leaving the plane. But he was comforted by the thought of what he would say to Crazy Purcell concerning the application of intelligent principles and trust to the natives.

He looked up and saw a group of them staring at him. In their eyes was a glitter he had not seen before.

And as he looked, the jungle was lighted with a brilliant flash and reeled before him. A rending, crashing sound roared in his ears. Darkness, in a long sheet, fell over him.

WHEN the darkness lifted, his head ached. The weariness in every bone seemed more intense, more painful. He discovered that he was on his feet. He tried to move, but could not. It was then that he opened his eyes.

Before him, in a semicircle about a fire that blazed and crackled to the lower branches of the trees, squatted the men of Richelieu, the Cardinal, their eyes fastened on him in unholy fascination. Their thick lips hung loose and slavering as they watched. In their eyes was a strange mingling of fear and anticipation. On top of the fire he beheld, blazing, his volume of Thomas

Paine. Nearby lay the automatic and machine gun. And from somewhere came the soft throbbing of a small drum.

He discovered that he was tied to a tree. Stinging sweat that was cold started from his every pore, and he shivered. Then from the squatting ring stepped Richelieu. In one hand he held Crazy Purcell's flask of rum and in the other the cigar, which he had not yet lighted. Beneath his arm was a long, keen machete, and in his eyes was an expression that increased David's shivering.

He took a long pull at the flask.

"You are not a god?" he asked.

David was consistent. He smiled bravely, if weakly.

"I am not a god," he said.

"You can not harm us?"

"I can not harm you—we are brothers."

The Cardinal took another drink.

"Then listen, *blanc*," he said. "I say we are not brothers! I say that I hate you and all *blancs*. And yesterday, with the waning of the sun, when you asked that we show you the way, I said, 'This *blanc* is no god, even if he does ride the bird; for if he be a god why should he ask us to show him the way?' And you said you were as we. Then we led you in a circle to see if you would know, and you did not know. And when the fever came to you I said again—

" 'This *blanc* is no god, for if he be a god, why must we give him the herbs to drive the fever from him?' So I said with this morning's sun, 'This *blanc* is a fool, but still a *blanc*, though no god. We will eat him, for his flesh will give us strength and his blood will be fire within us and his heart will give us courage, and we will rub our guns with his brains so that they will shoot straight. For these things the *blancs* have that we have not.'

"But my men were afraid and still they are afraid. But I, Richelieu, am not afraid. So I said, 'I, Richelieu, will say to all gods that I and I only am the one to blame for harming this *blanc*,' and so I do."

In the weird light of that fire, while David Rankin looked on and in his horror hardly comprehended, and while the scores of savages watched their chief with snake-like eyes, the Cardinal raised his hands, one of which held a flask of rum and the other a cigar, to the heavens.

"Gods of the *blancs* and all gods," he cried, "listen to Richelieu! I will kill this man and I will eat him and so will my men. But if there is punishment, I, Richelieu, am to blame! I, Richelieu!" He repeated it, for he was brave.

"But we are brothers!" screamed David.

Richelieu laughed, showing his filed teeth. He drained Crazy Purcell's flask, threw it away, plucked an ember from the fire and lighted the cigar. Then he advanced toward David.

The drum ceased temporarily. The fire licked upward toward the trees, and its crackling and the stirring of a vagrant night wind in the branches were the only sounds. Behind the chief the black men squatted, their eyes on David, their lips slavering heavily, their faces demoniac in the lambent light of the flames.

And David, standing bound to the tree, watched the Cardinal. For an instant things in procession flashed through his mind—his home in New England, his mother and his family, his principles, the volume of Thomas Paine, Crazy Purcell and how much he liked Crazy Purcell, the barracks, the planes, all that he was or ever had been. He said that this could not be. He said that this man, this Richelieu, would not do this heinous thing. Why, he had called this man "brother"!

Then suddenly David saw the Cardinal quite close. The savage blew out a tremendous cloud of smoke and grinned. Crazy Purcell's rum seemed to have affected him: his eyes were weirdly drunken. He waved the cigar.

"It is good, fool of a *blanc*," he said.

He came closer, raised his hands to heaven again.

"I, Richelieu!" he cried.

He thrust the cigar in his mouth, puffed heavily, felt the edge of his machete and advanced.

Suddenly fire flashed from his face. His head was almost blotted out in smoke. He reeled in fear and anguish, and his scream was echoed by terror stricken savages. The Cardinal dropped his machete. He whirled round and round, whining, his hands clawing frantically at his eyes.

And then David, goggling with astonishment, saw something else. Several of the savages, their machetes raised and their faces grim with determination, were creeping toward the gyrating figure. Their blades flicked fiercely, and they did not cease their furious strokes even after the Cardinal lay, a butchered mass of carrion, at their feet. And even in his horror, the significance of the scene flashed upon David. This was vengeance. The Cardinal had beguiled them to challenge the might of a god; and the god had replied with terrible, swift fire. And that his vengeance should not include them, they disowned him, cast him forth in death.

The blacks, even those with bloodied blades, stood silently watching the bemused face of the white man.

THEY thought, next morning at headquarters, that it was a raid at first, for it sounded like one and it looked like one. Down the street, running and yelling, dancing and waving their arms, came a file of savages. But they bore aloft a white man who wore a torn khaki uniform and an aviator's helmet.

It was David Rankin, the cigar smoker, who believed in the brotherhood of man.

The blacks who bore him were the men of Richelieu, the Cardinal; and behind them, at the end of a long rope, dragged what remained of the terrible *caco* chief.

The Marines rushed out, halted the procession and marched the blacks off to prison. David Rankin, very pale, was taken to the offices of the commandant. He told his tale slowly and ponderously, until the impatient commandant cut in:

"But what happened? How did you get out of it?"

"The cigar," said David, looking narrowly at Crazy Purcell, who sat nearby, "exploded. It blinded him."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Crazy. He was hollow eyed and haggard from searching for David. "They said in Port au Prince it wouldn't hurt anybody. They said it would only puff up and scare him."

"Idiot!" snapped the commandant. "Don't you know those things are always dangerous?"

And right there David Rankin committed a second insubordination. He walked across and delivered Crazy Purcell a clout in the jaw. It knocked Crazy out of his chair.

"Hey!" said Crazy, not at all like an officer to a subordinate. "What the hell's the point?"

"I don't think that was a very good joke," said the mechanic; for David Rankin did not own a sense of humor.

But the Corps had a sense of humor. David Rankin was never prosecuted for his insubordination. Somehow the news of it never got out, for Crazy Purcell and the other officers agreed to forget it. And when, only a short time later, David Rankin was sent back to the States—a bit early, it is true—to be discharged, he took with him the Army Distinguished Service Cross, presented by the High Commissioner himself, and the Haitian Medaille Militaire, presented by the President, both of which he accepted with reluctance.

He was returning to the States, he said, to become instructor of Theological Philosophy at the seminary from which he had been graduated.

And, considering David Rankin comprehensively, who could think of a better job for him?

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

FURTHER sidelights on the Civil War: notes sent in by Gordon Young to accompany his serial, "When The Bravest Trembled", Part II of which appears in this issue:

Sherman

"His achievements in the war were perhaps, on the whole, more striking and brilliant than those performed by any other officer, Federal or Confederate . . . He was a man of the most marked individual traits of character. He was bold in action and speech . . . There has been nobody in our time like Gen. Sherman . . . It is true that no man was ever more fertile in expedients than Gen. Sherman; but then no man was ever more particular in arranging the details of a military expedition." (John C. Ropes, in "Critical Sketches of Federal and Confederate Commanders.")

"I have seen him (Sherman) ride from front to rear of a column and it would be a continuous exchange of salutations and remarks. Between their cheers the men would shout good-natured remarks at 'Uncle Billy', and he would talk to them in return . . . It seemed to me sometimes as if he would speak to almost every man in the column while we were passing. No matter what was on his mind he never seemed abstracted and he was always ready to chaff the boys." ("Life and Reminiscences of Gen. William T. Sherman, by the Distinguished Men of his Times", p. 63.)

The following is from the diary of George Ward Nichols, aide-de-camp to Sherman during the march through Georgia: "Gen. Sherman demands nothing of his soldiers which he does not share. His staff is smaller than that of any brigade commander in the army" ("Story of the Great March," p. 130.) From the same book: "Gen. Sherman's memory is marvelous . . . he sees what many persons suppose it is impossible for his eye to reach . . . nothing escapes that piercing eye . . . little children cling to the General's knees and nestle in his arms with intuitive faith and affection. During our sojourn in Savannah, his headquarters and the private room became the playground of hosts of little ones, upon whom the door was never closed, no matter what business was pending." (p. 117-119.)

Sherman said, "The Southerners are impetuous and will fight quicker and fiercer, but they give out sooner; the Northerners are slower, but they stay longer; they have more endurance and fight steadier and more stubbornly. In fighting qualities, the South resembles France; the North, England. Put the two together and the devil couldn't whip them." (Johnson's "Sherman," p. 562.)

When Sherman resigned from the Louisiana State Military Academy to go North, Gov. Moore wrote: "You cannot regret more than I do the necessity which deprives us of your services, and you will bear with you the respect, confidence and admiration of all who have been associated with you." (Sherman's "Memoirs," I, p. 158.)

As soon as Sumter fell, Senator Sherman wrote his brother, "You can choose your own place" in the War Department. ("Sherman Letters," p. 112.) Sherman said, "Really I do not conceive myself qualified for Quartermaster General or Major General. To attain either station I would prefer a previous schooling with large masses of troops in the field." ("Sherman Letters", p. 123.) Lincoln was amused and must have been pleased by Sherman's insistence that he wanted to serve in a subordinate capacity. (Sherman's "Memoirs", I, p. 193.)

The newspapers took up the clamor that Sherman was crazy because he had told Cameron it would take 200,000 men to occupy and hold the West. One newspaper editor justified his contribution to the scandal by saying "it was one of the news items of the day, and he had to keep up with the time." ("Memoirs", I, 216.)

Cameron (Secretary of War) "was quite talkative and laughed heartily at Sherman's idea that it would take 200,000 men to recover the Mississippi States. He made no secret of his belief that Sherman was crazy, and unfit for any military command. He derided Sherman's notions of the need of cavalry and artillery as old fashioned." (Quoted by Daniel Wait Howe in "Civil War Times" from Foulke's "Life of Oliver P. Morton", p. 16.)

Sherman was given to violent language, but "I do not recall an instance of hearing him speak unkindly of any one . . . He never grumbled." (Thomas C. Fletcher, introduction to "Life and Reminiscences of Gen. Sherman".) Gen. Wilson, in "Under the Old Flag", says that Sherman called his cavalry leader Kilpatrick "a hell of a damn fool", adding, "but that is just the sort of a man I want."

Sherman won his first fame at Shiloh. His report of the battle is filled with commendation for other officers. It is only from other sources than the report of "Memoirs" that one learns Sherman was twice wounded and had three horses killed under him. (Hart's "Sherman", p. 127.) Sherman later in the war had reason to dislike

Gen. McClernand and especially Gen. Halleck; but in his "Memoirs" he never blotted a word of the praise he had earlier thought due them.

Sherman became a popular hero after Shiloh, and the newspapers tried to give him the credit for capturing Vicksburg. Sherman publicly said, "I see that many newspapers of the country have credited me with originating the plan adopted by Gen. Grant for the capture of Vicksburg. I want to say that I am not entitled to this credit. Gen. Grant alone originated that plan and carried it to a successful completion without the co-operation of any of his subordinate officers, and in the face of my protests, as well as that of many of the officers." (Johnson's "Sherman", p. 553.)

Sherman was surprised at being made a Brigadier-General after Bull Run, and said he had to learn tactics from books. ("Memoirs", pp. 191, 192.)

McDowell.

McDowell was only a major in the Regular Army at Bull Run. ("Butler's Book", p. 863.) Three months before he was merely a captain. (p. 290.) McDowell told Russell, "My Diary" p. 395, that he had no map of Virginia worthy of the name and so did not know what he was getting into. McDowell was a prodigious eater but he did not drink. (Wilson, "Under the Old Flag", I, p. 66.) Under orders, he took possession of Lee's Arlington home, but refused to occupy the house and slept in a tent. (Young's "Marse Robert", p. 92.) Confederate General Early wrote that McDowell made an effort to prevent the depredations of his troops; but affirms that no other Federal commander ever did. ("Lieut. Gen. Jubal Anderson Early". Notes by R. H. Early, p. 40.)

IN accordance with the old *Adventure* custom, on the occasion of his first story in our pages, B. E. Cook rises to introduce himself to the members of the Camp-fire:

Fall River, Massachusetts

For several years I have been witnessing the ups and downs of a certain father who was trying to salt off his "wise" son. This accounts, perhaps, for the story that serves to enter me on the cradleroll of writers for *Adventure* in this number.

As for Berton E. Cook, he was born in the Bay State, on the wind'ard side of Beantown (Boston), in a day that saw "ghost trains" leaving Amesbury nightly, covered with new carriages clad in white cotton coverings.

He inhaled enough Maine ozone to break the forecast that he'd live out only nineteen years. He spent five years at Syracuse University for a combined teaching and forestry course. Those summers he spent in dungarees or uniform aboard coastwise ships out of New York. He gathered several things from this double sort of existence; among them, a degree, an able seaman's blue card, a brace of eight-ounce gloves, time enough for the third mate coastwise exam—and what have you?

Followed a short, snappy go at timber cruising as compass man in the Forest Service; then teaching, occasional trips on colliers, a berth in the old *Veerhaven's* focsle during the World War—and between times, a sporting family.

Cook's yarns reek of salt water. The reason is the fact that his forbears were not bears, but they were all web-footed. Both sides. They were doing the handline haul on the Grand Banks, girdling the earth in sail and winning chief engineers' tickets in a succession of deep-water generations that started this sort of life out of North American ports before a certain George Washington ordered his upper teeth from Paul Revere.

As far as that goes, Cook is stowing his sea bag right now. He's leaving port, not on some dandified yacht, but aboard one of the fastest, newest, trimmest colliers in the trade. Again he's going to see Winterquarter Lightship and Five Fathom that almost saw him and some forty others greet Davy Jones one night and . . . So long till he's in port again! —BERTON E. COOK

A LETTER from Pink Simms on the subject of super-speed and close grouping in revolver shooting:

Lewistown, Montana

In the September *Adventure* there is some comment on my letter to Mr. Laurence Edmund Allen which appears in the June issue. Mr. A. Cunningham of El Paso, Texas, makes some very caustic remarks which are entirely unwarranted. He feels that his knowledge of the revolver shooting game is so thorough that from his opinion there can be no appeal.

Apparently he has not read the various published articles on the subject or kept himself posted on the later results secured from experiments conducted by such men as McGivern in their efforts to combine accuracy with speed when using double-action revolvers of the later designs perfected in the high-grade Smith & Wesson and Colt revolvers.

Mr. Cunningham makes the mistake of assuming that Mr. McGivern, or any one else, can not use double-action revolvers and make the "dime size" groups mentioned. Mr. McGivern uses revolvers of all calibers from .22 to .45 in the course of his tests, demonstrations and exhibitions. I mentioned the .38 as his favorite for high speed accurate work. One of the new .38-.44 Smith & Wesson revolvers with 5-inch barrel and target sights is now brought out under the name of the McGivern Model due to its wonderful adaptability as an all around purpose gun of high quality, combining as it does speed and accuracy.

SEVERAL years ago in an effort to settle just such arguments as the present one, that double-action guns could not be operated at any such speed or that they would not make groups around the size of a dime from a machine rest, Mr. McGivern built a gear and lever operated machine

rest expressly for the purpose of testing out .38 caliber Smith & Wesson and Colt revolvers. The witnessed results of the tests with this machine were published at that time, giving full details. Both makes of revolvers operated at a rate of speed of 6 shots in *less* than 2/5 of a second. The groups of six shots on paper targets placed 20 feet from the machine rest were often covered by a dime.

The 2/5 second 5-shot group shooting now under discussion was mentioned and the method of procedure described somewhat in detail in February 1933 issue of *Outdoor Life,* pages 52 and 53. The February *Outdoor Life* article beginning on page 25 describes the electric timing equipment and contact mechanism attached to the revolvers, and gives comparative tables of fractions of time between shots, as required for super-speed group shooting from 4/5 seconds for 6 shots down to 2/5 seconds for 5 shots, for all of which we would not be allowed space here.

MR. CUNNINGHAM shouts in a loud voice, "impossible!" There are, besides Mr. McGivern, at least a half-dozen men in this town, trained by him, who have made groups, with double-action revolvers, that are the size of a dime; these targets are all well witnessed. As for the speed mentioned, McGivern is the only man I know of that has attained such speed.

It takes a good many thousand rounds of ammunition, years of study and careful practice to develop the skill necessary to make such records as McGivern's. Some of them are difficult for even him to duplicate, but when once made the results should stand for all time, and though he may never perform the feat again, it detracts nothing from the original performance.

The term "world's champion" that was commented on is I believe correctly applied and I stick to it. As far as I know McGivern has never called himself by that or any other such fancy title. Nevertheless that is what he is generally considered to be where super-speed is mentioned; and derogatory remarks of no man can change the facts. Until some one excels McGivern's super-speed and flying target shooting with revolvers, I will still maintain that is what he is regardless who may wear the nominal crown. This statement is based upon the best of my belief after the most diligent search has failed to reveal any reports of any such performance elsewhere.

LAST winter Mr. McGivern was confined to his bed for three months. At that time he had several classes of revolver shooters under instruction, and of course could not give them his attention. Some one who knew the shooting game and its development was needed to keep the classes going. Sergeant Leonard Larson, of Co. K, 163, Inf., and I were glad of the opportunity to assist in carrying the work along until McGivern was able to get around again. Ed. McGivern has a very efficient way of instructing revolver shooters, a system that is all his own, and neither myself or any other person that I know of has such a system or can copy it. I want to add that the Lewistown, Montana, police force, all trained by McGivern, are not only excellent revolver shots but are the most efficiently trained group on fast double-action shooting that I have ever seen. Their fast draw work combining sure hits with plenty of speed and their rapid-fire targets made under different and sometimes quite difficult conditions, such as in partly darkened rooms and other poor light conditions, show merit of the highest order.

I did not have any intention of trying to create the impression that the dime size groups, when shot by McGivern or any of the other shooters, could also be done in 2/5 of a second. The close grouping was one performance and the super-speed shooting was an entirely different performance when operating the guns entirely by hand. But when operating the guns in the gear-equipped machine rest, the two results were quite often combined just as I mentioned them.

THERE are five articles in *Outdoor Life* (January, February, March, April and May, 1933) wherein this fast and fancy shooting is explained in detail, with a number of photos that show conclusively that the fast and fancy shooting mentioned therein has all been done as described. An article in October 1932 issue of *The American Rifleman* covers the subject pretty well and shows several new stunts in the flying or aerial target shooting line, all of which makes it unnecessary to give it here. "Burning Powder" by D. B. Wesson, gives other details, including dime size groups made at 20 feet with S & W K-22 double-action revolvers by carefully aimed, very deliberate slow fire. Pages 106 and 107. This shooting was done at Lewistown, Montana. This book also shows on page 120 a full size target with a group of six shots well hidden under a dime, that were shot with a .38 Smith & Wesson revolver from a machine rest, using 38/44 high speed cartridges, at a distance of 20 yards—just three times as far as the 20 feet under discussion.

I wish to call attention to a few facts taken from some of the former arguments which were the cause of the firing machine (herein mentioned) being built, to prove certain points at issue:

When McGivern first demonstrated his ability to place repeatedly five bullets and quite often six bullets into a can before it reached the ground after being tossed in the air to a height of around 20 feet (as illustrated recently in *Outdoor Life* and other places) there was much excitement and plenty of comment with a very decided "can't be done" flavor. Just as now exists in the present case. When McGivern demonstrated by hundreds of tests that he could control six bullets from a .38 double-action revolver in a space of time of 4/5 and later 3/5 of a second so as to make hand-size groups, there likewise was much argument and aggressive comment, all of which was finally cleared up and is now a matter of history. As history is pretty generally credited with repeating itself, the present instance seems to be a pretty good example of the rule.

Thanks to Mr. A. Cunningham for inviting me to El Paso. It would not be my first visit there. I can still remember when some men called it Franklyn, and San Elizario was spoken of more often. A visit there again will be a pleasure; it's a long ways down there, but not so long as it used to be from there to here, when one had to follow a cow to get here.

—PINK SIMMS

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Indians

MODERN canoes with outboard motors have supplanted the birchbark. And fringed buckskin is not being worn this Winter.

Request:—"1. Do the Indians of northeastern Canada use the birchbark canoe? 2. Do they ever wear fringed buckskin clothing?"

—JOHN BUCHANAN, New York City

Reply, by Mr. S. E. Sangster:—1. The birchbark canoe is virtually a craft of the past and few are now found anywhere in Canada. The northern Indians use almost wholly the more modern type—the canvas-covered Chestnut or Peterborough canoes, generally of 16 and 17 ft. lengths. Many also make use of outboard motors on square-stern freight canoes for traveling any distance or taking in their supplies and camp outfit for the Winter trapline.

2. No, they do not use buckskin clothing—that, too, is rarely seen; wool underwear, mackinaw shirts, mackinaw outer clothing in Winter and somewhat lighter flannel shirts and duck clothing in the Summer months.

Boots

MINER'S footgear for comfort in the fire-house.

Request:—"I am on the Memphis Fire Dept. I want a pair of miner's boots (the square-toed, flat-heeled style) to wear around the engine-house in Winter and turn out in in Summer.

As you live out West, perhaps you could tell me of a retailer who might have them in stock, or a manufacturer."

—R. K. PRICE, Memphis, Tennessee

Reply, by Mr. Gordon Gordon:—Miners' boots vary as much in style and make-up as footwear for women. For your use about the fire engine house, however, the ten-inch waterproof leather boot or the rubber "pac" would probably be best.

The rubber "pac" is the lowest in cost, ranging three, four and five dollars. The rubber, of course, doesn't last so long as hard leather if put to a lot of rough usage. The leather boots run eight, nine and ten dollars. Most of them are of double-stitched sole and have a full leather heel. Like all miners' boots, they are brass-nailed.

If you want a larger or smaller size than the ten-inch, which is usually used, you can get them from six to sixteen inches.

There are several good brands on the market. To get the best price, I would suggest that you write the "General Merchandise Store" in such mining towns as Bisbee, Douglas, Miami, Globe and Jerome—all in Arizona. Unless the boot is "fancy" with a great many tooled lines, you shouldn't pay more than the prices quoted above.

Big Game

BATTERY for India.

Request:—"Some years ago my friend Lester Stephenson of Tulsa, Oklahoma, got some information from you about the rifles necessary for a shooting trip, first in India, and then in East Africa. It was guns such as you yourself use that you recommended.

I am also an oil man and I am going to India in the near future. Stephenson is still in the East, so would you be kind enough to give me the information you so kindly gave him? I know the weapons were ideal for the purpose."

—JAS. M. WILSON, Monroe, Louisiana

Reply, by Capt. A. R. Beverley-Giddings:—My personal battery consists of:

A .318 Westley-Richards for cartridges containing bullets (solid, L. T. pointed and copper capped) of 250 grains. This is a bolt action magazine rifle.

A .470 Westley-Richards double-barreled express rifle.

A .20 bore double-barreled shotgun.

A 9 Mm. Luger automatic pistol.

I am aware that many Americans include a third rifle. Their usual battery is: a .30 Springfield; a .405 Winchester or .400 Whelan and an English double express. The American fondness for that really accurate rifle, the .30 Springfield, is doubtless the reason for the medium-power rifle, because the Springfield has not the punch

for dangerous game. So the .405 is included. The .318 is an extremely powerful rifle for its caliber (.318) and with the copper-capped bullet it makes a good lion or tiger rifle. For close quarters with dangerous game I like the double .470.

In most British dependencies the .45, or as some call it, the .450 caliber is banned. Hence the preference for the 9 Mm. Luger in place of the .45 Automatic Colt.

Frog

RECIPE for a mess o' laigs.

Request:—"Will you kindly send me recipes for preparing and cooking frog legs?"

—H. L. HOWE, Farlington, Kansas

Reply, by Mr. Paul M. Fink:—Frog legs should be soaked for an hour or so in salt water, then removed and dried. Roll in flour and fry in a pan not too hot, searing both sides at first. Fry to a light golden brown, not until the meat is dry and hard. Believe you me, properly prepared, "a mess o' laigs" is a royal feast.

Honduras

RIO NEGRO as a hunting ground for crocodiles.

Request:—"Will you kindly give me all the information you can on the Rio Negro in Honduras—such as how far up the river can a boat drawing 24 inches navigate? And if crocodiles can be caught in paying numbers?"

—VERNON F. COOMBS, Tampa, Florida

Reply, by Mr. E. Bruguiere:—I believe that in moderately wet weather the Rio Negro is navigable for more than half its length for a boat of two feet draft with complete safety. At just what point rocks would become a hazard I can't say, so I suggest that you write the captain of the Port of La Ceiba. There are many sharks and crocodiles all along the Honduran coast; the latter frequently being found even near the source of rivers.

Rhodesia

PERHAPS the source of some Old Testament wealth.

Request:—"What is the supposed origin of the Zimbabwe ruins in Rhodesia?"

—L. ROBERT TSCHIRKY, Pawling, New York

Reply, by Capt. F. J. Franklin:—Their origin is unknown. Various theories, however, have been formulated concerning these ruins and their roofless temples, towers and passages. In the main, opinion is divided into several schools, one group perhaps believing that the ruins are ancient and the work of a cultured race. Others hold to the view that the structures are the work of natives of medieval times. It is clear, however, that they represent the remains of a city where large communities dwelt ages ago. Well known authorities have linked up the ancient gold workings of Zimbabwe with the wealth of the monarchs of the Old Testament. The riddle remains, however.

Longitude

WHY La Salle blundered.

Request:—"How was longitude determined in the old sailing days? I refer to the time of La Salle and Cook. On their voyages of over a year, without reliable timepieces, could they determine their longitude at all closely?

We know that La Salle explored the Mississippi from Illinois south to somewhere near the Gulf, but when he tried to locate the mouth of the Mississippi by sailing into the Gulf of Mexico he missed it entirely and lost his life trying to locate the river by traveling overland. If longitude is easily found without an accurate chronometer but with the help of almanacs and a fair knowledge of astronomy, how did La Salle blunder?"

—H. G. HUTCHINSON, Whitefish, Ontario

Reply, by Captain Dingle:—Longitude, before chronometers were perfected, was ascertained by Lunar Distances, a somewhat involved operation calling for considerable figure sense. Prior to that, by Transit of some planet—but this method was used only at some solid shore station to establish the longitude of that station, and could be used only when a planet was in transit. It was not practicable at sea. Cook made one of his voyages to the Pacific to observe the Transit of Venus for longitudinal purposes. La Salle could have had none of these helps, but most probably followed the usual method of reaching a certain latitude, then running down it until he found his port. If his latitude chanced to be in error—a very keen possibility in those days—he might never find his point. Finding longitude was never easy before Lunars, and not always afterward.

Ducks

PINIONING—an unsporting practice which our expert condemns.

Request:—"I am writing you for information as to the method of pinioning (I think this is the word used) live ducks, making them unable to fly. These ducks are then used as decoys."

—PAT MACDONALD, Marine City, Michigan

Reply, by Mr. Davis Quinn:—Pinioning consists of amputating the distal part of the wing, including the carpo-metacarpus and phalanges. In other words, the wing is severed at the last apparent joint or a little beyond.

Not only is it cruel in the extreme to thus maim healthy birds; it is in my opinion unspeakable treachery to place any helpless animal in the position of luring its kind to slaughter. Due to various factors among which are periodic drought in breeding grounds, baiting and the use of live decoys, our fine species of waterfowl are vanishing fast, and if the last two named practices continue much longer there will be nothing left to shoot at in this line but domestic geese. If ducks are so scarce that one has to maim a few stray birds for lures, then I think it is time to

quit shooting ducks till said ducks grow a bit more plentiful—or what do you think?

Army

THERE have been only nine full generals in the history of the U. S. A.

Request:—"Will you please be so kind as to give me the names of all who have been *full* generals in the Army of the United States?"

—J. C. BENNETT, Des Moines, Iowa

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—Nine men have held the rank of General in the United States Army. They are, in order: George Washington, U. S. Grant, William T. Sherman, Philip Sheridan, John J. Pershing, Tasker H. Bliss, Peyton C. March, Charles P. Summerall and Douglas MacArthur.

It will be noted that only four men had held this rank up until the time of the World War. Pershing, Bliss and March received the rank in recognition of their services in the World War. The rank came to Generals Summerall and MacArthur under a law passed a few years ago which provides that the Chief-of-Staff shall have the rank—but not the pay—of a general while serving as such and to hold the rank upon the retired list—again without any increase in pay.

Australia

SHEEP-SHEARING averages down-under.

Request:—"Will you please tell me how many sheep an Australian top hand can shear in ten hours with a blade? How many he can shear with a machine clipper?"

—K. D. WELLS, Wildwood, Georgia

Reply, by Mr. Alan Foley:—The average number of sheep shorn by one man in one day is 80 when using hand shears and 110 when using machine clippers.

The above totals are for a working day of eight hours. Shearers here work only eight hours—in two-hour shifts, from 7:30 to 9:30, 10 to 12, 1 to 3, and 3:30 to 5:30.

The figures given are for a regular average from day to day by shearers of average class. Record tallies are around one hundred per cent higher than average.

Mr. Jack Donald Palmer, formerly of Dallas, Texas: Please communicate with this department.

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Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.

Navy Matters, United States and Foreign—LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER VERNON C. BIXBY, U.S.N. (retired), P. O. Box 588, Orlando, Fla.

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State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, Box 174, Farmingdale, N. J.

Federal Investigative Activities *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, Box 174, Farmingdale, N. J.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, 189-16 Thirty-seventh Avenue, Flushing, New York.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—MAJOR THOMAS H. DAMERON, 1709 Berkley Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure*.

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure*.

Entomology *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects, etc.*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

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Ornithology *Birds; their habits and distribution.*—DAVIS QUINN, 3548 Tryon Ave., Bronx, New York, N. Y.

Stamps DR. H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

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Old Songs that Men Have Sung ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 995 Pine St., San Francisco, California.

Football JOHN B. FOSTER, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose Street, New York City.

Baseball FREDERICK LIEB, *The New York Evening Post*, 75 West St., New York City.

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, P. O. Box 163, Jenkintown, Pa.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure*.

Wrestling CHARLES B. CRANFORD, 35 E. 22nd St., New York City.

Boxing CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH.

Fencing CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, wages, duties, statistics and records of American shipping. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all government owned vessels.—LIEUT. HARRY E. RIESEBERG, 47 Dick St., Rosemont, Alexandria, Va.

The Sea Part 2 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN DINGLE, care *Adventure*.

The Sea Part 3 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans: Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.) *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPTAIN DINGLE, care *Adventure*.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNER, Quartzsite, Arizona, care of Conner Field.

New Guinea L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

Australia and Tasmania ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

South Sea Islands WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Cardross," Suva, Fiji.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, Box 197, Centerport, Long Island, N. Y.

Asia Part 2 *Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies in general, India, Kashmir, Nepal. No questions on employment.*—CAPT. R. W. VAN RAVEN DE STURLER, care *Adventure*.

Asia Part 3 *Anam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin-China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

Asia Part 4 *Southern and Eastern China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

Asia Part 6 *Northern China and Mongolia.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., U. S. Veterans' Hospital, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Asia Part 7 *Japan.*—OSCAR E. RILEY, 4 Huntington Ave., Scarsdale, New York.

Asia Part 8 *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY-GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*.

Africa Part 1 *Egypt, Tunis, Algeria.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

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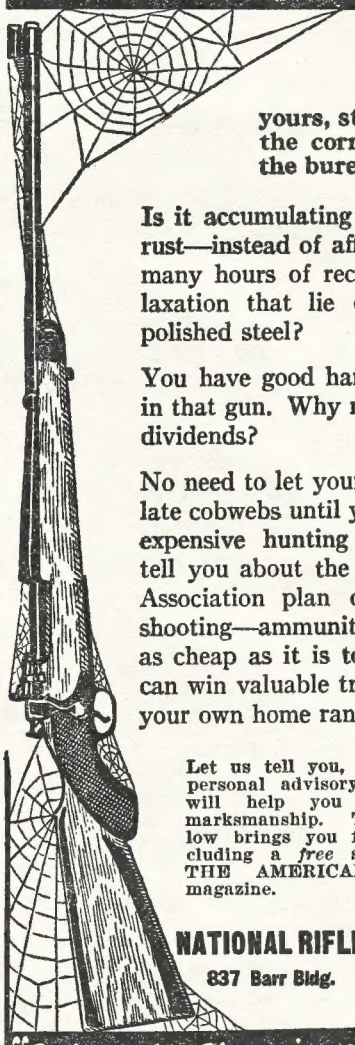

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